

**Catholic Schools Week
The Memorial of Saint John Bosco
January 31, 2012**

**Quincy Notre Dame High School
Quincy, Illinois**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: as we gather today to celebrate the Holy Mass in honor of this Catholic Schools Week we have before us the theme of “Faith – Academics – Service.”

Together, these three words make up the task of every Catholic School, but if taken apart, the identity of a Catholic school either weakens or ceases to exist. Quincy Notre Dame High School provides a valuable resource in providing Catholic education in our Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, and for this, I am very grateful.

We gather today at the altar of the Lord on this memorial of Saint John Bosco whose soul was set afire with love for the youth of the Church. This same flame of love burns within us and so we have asked the Lord that, “afire with the same fire of love, we may seek out souls and serve [him] alone.”¹

Catholic schools help us to know where we're going in life and guide us on the path to the place where we all belong - in God's hands.

There's a song by a group called Linkin Park that expresses the need that we all have to find this place where love is real and not phony. It's called "Somewhere I Belong."

Somewhere I Belong - Linkin Park

I wanna heal, I wanna feel, what I thought was never real

I wanna let go of the pain I've felt so long.

I wanna heal, I wanna feel, like I'm close to something real.

I wanna find something I've wanted all along

Somewhere I belong.

Like the Linkin Park song says, "I wanna feel like I'm close to something real. I wanna find something I've wanted all along: somewhere I belong." Well, there IS somewhere you belong and you've found it: Quincy Notre Dame High School is where you belong because it is where you will find the real thing - Jesus Christ and his Church.

In a few moments, after we have received the Body and Blood of the Lord, we will ask that "we may show in our hearts and by our deeds both

fraternal charity and the light of truth.”² It is this two-fold desire that so consumed the soul of Saint John Bosco and led him to spend his life in service to the youth of Italy, teaching them to live a good and upright life and manifesting for them the love of God.

In our own day we may be tempted to wonder what it was about this priest that attracted so many boys to him. Why did they listen to him and cling so devotedly to him? The answer is simple: the man of God truly loved them. His love for them was sincere and clear in all that he said to lead them out of their sin, and in all that he did for them to provide for their physical needs. Through his words and deeds he called them to greatness and showed them the way to achieve it, all the while showing them the joy that comes from faith.

He knew that “the teacher who is seen only in the classroom and nowhere else, is a teacher and nothing more; but let him go with his boys to recreation and he becomes a brother.” In all of this Saint John Bosco is an eminently fitting model for us this Catholic Schools Week as we consider this year’s theme of “Faith – Academics – Service.”

The very foundation of a Catholic School is the faith of Jesus Christ handed on to us through the Catholic Church founded upon Peter and the

Apostles. The encounter with Jesus Christ changed the lives of these men and led them to introduce others to the man who gave them no answers but simply invited them to follow him. There was something about his presence, about his words, that drew them to Jesus and once they met him they could not simply walk away from him.

In him they placed their faith and to him they entrusted their lives. Saint John Bosco, too, was familiar with the Lord and met him the Sacraments, in the Scriptures and in the Church and once he met the Lord he, too, could not simply walk away. He also put his faith in the Lord Jesus and entrusted his life to him and he desired to help everyone he met do the same.

Is this not what it means to have faith, to give everything to him who gave everything to us? For this reason, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go" (Hebrews 11:8). Does it not often seem this way to us, as well? That we know the Lord has called us but we are not certain where he is calling us to go or what he is calling us to do? Abraham did not know where he was to go, yet nonetheless he went and trusted the Lord would reveal his destination to him.

It is this faith, this willingness to entrust our very lives entirely to the Lord, that must lie at the heart of every Catholic school; if this primary education in discipleship is not the guiding principle of every Catholic school, we might as well shutter their doors.

Such radical trust in the Lord is the only way to arrive at a life of true service which is the way to greatness. The Savior tells us plainly: "Whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matthew 20:26-27). The Lord himself lives out this teaching for us and calls us to follow his example. Because Jesus humbled himself and died for our sins, the Father raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand where he now reigns in glory. The same is true for us: we must humble ourselves so to be exalted by the Lord.

We have seen that faith leads to service, but what of academics? The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells us: "By faith we understand that the universe was ordered by the word of God, so that what is visible came into being through the invisible" (Hebrews 11:3). Because God has created everything that exists, by studying the world around us we come to a deeper understanding of the mind of God. The greater we understand his

designs and purposes, the more we are able to put our trust in him and in his purposes for us. And the more we trust in him the more we will imitate him and the greater we will be.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ *Roman Missal*, Collect for the Memorial of Saint John Bosco.

² *Roman Missal*, Common of Holy Men and Women, For Educators, Prayer After Communion.