

**Homily for the Blessing of the New School Building
Saint Mary Parish
Taylorville, Illinois**

August 28, 2017

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Monsignor(s) and Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, faculty, staff, students, alumni, parishioners of Saint Mary Parish, my brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good for us to be here to offer praise and thanks to God for the many gifts he bestows upon us, in particular, for the gift of learning as we bless this new school building in which, not only will the minds of our youth be educated in order to become fully involved citizens of our society, but also their hearts will be formed in the love of God so that they will be true disciples of our Lord.

Today, we celebrate the feast of Saint Augustine of Hippo, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. As a well-known philosopher and theologian, Saint Augustine's influence is felt even today in many of the Church's teachings and practices. However, Saint Augustine is best known for his conversion from living a life that focused on building up treasure on earth to a life of virtue that focused on building up spiritual treasure in Heaven.

As with any sort of change of heart, Saint Augustine's conversion did not occur on his own or in a vacuum devoid of the influence of others. Rather, it occurred through the prayers of his mother, Saint Monica, who dedicated herself to praying for Augustine's transformation, as well as through the influence of his teacher and mentor, Saint Ambrose, who instructed him in the faith and ultimately led him to his vocation of being a priest and bishop of the Church.

Just as with Saint Augustine, our conversion, that is, the turning of our hearts to live more authentically as Christ's disciples, does not take place on our own. For if we were to live in the midst of the world without the support of our community of faith, we would most likely have a significantly more challenging time living the discipleship and stewardship way of life.

For you see, just as Saint Monica prayed for her son, so too does our Blessed Mother, Mary, pray for all of us that we might come more and more to know her Son and live as His disciples. As Saint Ambrose did for Saint Augustine, the Church carries out the sacred mission of instructing our hearts and minds so that we, too, might be led to our particular vocation and supported in living out God's call for everyone to be holy.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us never lose sight of the fact that this ongoing conversion of heart, namely, to follow our Lord more closely as His disciples, is what we as Christians should be focused on in our daily lives. One aspect of that call of our Lord, to be His disciples, is to hand on the faith to others. While we can each do this in our daily lives by being models of Christian discipleship to those around us, so too do the Church carry on this sacred duty and follow the model of Christ, the great Teacher, through her mission to form hearts and minds in our Catholic schools. In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI spoke about the sacred task of the Church to educate the youth in the following words that he spoke in an address to Catholic educators in 2008 in Washington, D.C.:

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 4). This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church.¹

So, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we bless the new building of Saint Mary's School, let us remember that none of the classes that will take place in this new building, whether math or science or art or social studies or physical education, can ever really be disconnected from the study of our Catholic faith. For as the students of Saint Mary's School learn more about the way God governs the universe through their studies, they will also encounter the living God and learn of His great love for them and His desire, as our first today reading points out, for us to reflect that love to others.

Therefore, on this, the feast of Saint Augustine, may we commit ourselves ever more diligently to a daily strengthening of our mind and conversion of our heart so that we, like the many great Saints who have gone before us, might more closely unite our lives to that of Christ and so live as His disciples.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Meeting with Catholic Educators, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, *Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., Thursday, 17 April 2008.*