

**Blessing of the New Addition to Blessed Sacrament School  
Springfield, Illinois**

**The Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A)  
August 14, 2011**

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

Reverend and dear Fathers, my brother Deacons, [men and women religious,] brothers and sisters in Christ:

In 1995, a successful French journalist named Jean-Dominique Bauby, suffered a massive stroke at the age of forty-three. When he woke twenty days later, he discovered he could only blink one eye. The stroke had damaged his brainstem and he now had a condition called locked-in syndrome.

Despite his condition, Bauby developed a rapport with a therapist by the name of Claude Mendibil. They were able to communicate by a system called partner-assisted scanning. She would read out letters of the alphabet, and he would blink his eye when she arrived at the one he wanted. In such a way, he could spell out words and sentences, and thus express himself.

Using this technique, Bauby composed a memoir, which he named

*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. In it he describes life before and after his stroke. The book was published to great critical acclaim in 1997, just days before the author's death from pneumonia. It was made into a successful movie ten years later.

Apparently each word of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* took, on average, two minutes to compose. Approximately two hundred thousand blinks were required to finish the book. Jean-Dominique Bauby's resolve was legendary. His doggedness in the face of the almost impossible was truly incredible. His persistence is now immortalized in a text that is judged a modern classic for that very reason. His vision and determination have inspired millions across the world, uniting them in respect and admiration.

The healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter that we heard about in today's Gospel comes about through the mother's faithful perseverance. Jesus is impressed with her unrelenting prayer. Her faith is a wonderful example. Although his initial response seems hesitant, or even harsh, Jesus cannot ignore the cry of the poor woman, and she is rewarded. What an incredible gift - the restoration of her beloved daughter to full health. God's love is made manifest through her healing.

In the humility of the Canaanite woman, Saint Augustine saw a figure of the Church.<sup>1</sup> Whereas many of the Jews rejected Jesus in their pride, this woman, in her humility, implores Jesus to heal her daughter.

Of this Canaanite woman, Saint John Chrysostom cried out in praise: "Behold the woman's wisdom! She did not venture so much as to say a word against anyone else. She was not stung to see others praised, nor was she indignant to be reproached. Behold her constancy."<sup>2</sup> She did not argue with the Lord, but accepted the truth of his words.

She knew that the Gentiles - from which she came - lived like dogs in an unclean manner barking at their false gods.<sup>3</sup> Yet whereas many of the Jews did not recognize Jesus' divinity, she did, and begged him only for the crumbs others refused to eat. Because of her humility, the Lord answers her request.

Reflecting on the healing of the woman's daughter, Saint John Chrysostom asks,

"Do you see how this woman, too, contributed not a little to the healing of her daughter? For note that Christ did not say, 'Let your little daughter be made whole,' but 'Great is your faith, be it done for you as you desire.' These words were not uttered at random, nor

were they flattering words, but great was the power of her faith, and for our learning.”<sup>4</sup>

We must learn from her example; we must learn ever anew the value and strength of a humble faith.

Is this not among the principle tasks of a Catholic school, to instill within the young faithful, in cooperation with their parents and godparents, a humble faith?

It gives me great joy to be with you today to celebrate the Holy Eucharist and to bless the new addition of Blessed Sacrament School.

At its heart, Catholic education seeks to teach children to “observe what is right” and to “do what is just” through a sharing in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 56:1). This must always be the primary and guiding task of everyone who has a part to play in a Catholic school, whether principal or teacher, staff or volunteer, parent or student, coach or fan.

It must always be borne in mind that the task of educating children in the Catholic faith in a Catholic school is secondary to the task of parents to raise their children in the faith at home, which has often been called the domestic Church. If what is taught at school is not lived and practiced at

home, Catholic education loses its purpose and its ability to help students “reach the joy [God has] prepared for us beyond all our imagining.”<sup>5</sup>

We can reach the unimaginable joy of being in God’s presence forever by joining ourselves to the Lord in this life and becoming his servants (cf. Isaiah 56:6). For this reason, parents must strive to teach their children to keep the Sabbath day holy and to love both God and neighbor. Catholic education aims to assist parents in this task while teaching students about the natural world.

The education of children has been a vibrant and vital part of your parish life for the past eighty-six years when Blessed Sacrament School first opened its doors and welcomed its first students. You have labored diligently these past many months to ensure that the education of children will continue here for decades to come. On the completion of this new addition, I congratulate you and for your dedication to this important and necessary ministry of the Church I am grateful.

“Today we ask God’s blessing on this center of seeking, learning and teaching what is true. We ask that those entrusted with the education of children or young people in this institution may teach their students how to join the discoveries of human wisdom with the truth of the Gospel, so

that they will be able to keep the true faith and to live up to it in their lives. We also ask the Lord that the students will find their teachers the image of Christ, so that, enriched with both human and divine learning, they will in turn be able and ready to enlighten and assist others.”<sup>6</sup>

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Saint Augustine, *Sermon 77.11-12*.

<sup>2</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 52.3*. In *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament Vol. 1b: Matthew 14-28*, Manlio Simonetti et al, eds. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2002), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Epiphanius the Latin, *Interpretation of the Gospels*, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Collect, *Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time*.

<sup>6</sup> *Book of Blessings*, “Blessing of a New School or University,” 731.