

Tuesday of the 5th Week of the Year – Year I
Immaculate Conception Parish / St. Mary School, Mattoon, Illinois
February 8, 2011 (8:30 AM)

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Last week, at what was to be the beginning of Catholic Schools Week, we celebrated the memorial of Saint John Bosco, the patron saint of children and young people. His example is always worth considering because he taught his youth to turn their hearts to God and to keep his commandments, and he teaches us to do so, as well (cf. Psalm 119:36).

Bosco devoted his life to the care of poor and abandoned boys in the city of Turin, Italy because he knew they were made in the image and likeness of God (cf. Genesis 1:26); he provided them with a great home built on faith, hope and love, centered on Jesus Christ. He taught them both the arts and the faith and he gathered others around himself for this work. By his own fatherly care and great humor he conveyed to them the deep love of God for each one of them personally and led them on the path to holiness, filling them with hope. In this way, he showed them the greatness of a life well-lived; he showed them the way to lasting joy and

peace, the desire of every heart. Through his love, Don Bosco helped them to know God is indeed mindful of them and that he always cares for them (cf. Psalm 8:5).

This was his life's ambition, the goal of his tireless mission and enthusiastic love, to lead souls to God by uniting them into the one Body of Christ, the Church (cf. I Corinthians 12:12). Is this same goal not at the heart of every Catholic school? The task of every Catholic school is the education of our children in the arts and sciences, and above all – and this must not be forgotten – an education in the faith of the Church. Through an education in the Christian faith and of the world, we seek to form our students to use well the talents and gifts they have been given by God to found as “good and faithful servant[s]” of God and good citizens (Matthew 25:21).

Saint John Bosco, the great teacher and father to the young once said, “I have always labored lovingly for them [his boys].” With these words he provides an excellent model for all who have responsibility for young people; we must always work for them with the love of Jesus Christ always in our hearts. It is to his example that we – students, teachers, parents and

volunteers – must look if we truly long to make of our Catholic schools an “A+ for America.”

To you, dear children and young people, the holy priest gives this advice: “Be cheerful, but let your cheerfulness be genuine, stemming from a conscience free from sin.” The joy and enthusiasm of youth is no secret and even those who have grown old recall it with fondness, often desiring it again. Do not lose this joy! Do not let it be stifled, but let it come to perfection in Jesus Christ!

There are many voices telling you where you will find the fulfillment of this joy, where you will find the happiness you desire deep within. Some of these voices are true, but many of them are false and promise you what they cannot give.

Before you listen to these voices look first to see if the one who speaks is truly happy; be certain the voice is authentic. I am here to tell you, with great conviction, that the happiness you seek has a name and a face; the happiness you seek is Jesus Christ! Look to him and stay close to him always. Speak with him in your prayer; learn from him in the Sacred Scriptures; encounter him in the Sacraments. He will never

abandon you or lead you astray; rather, he will always say to you, “Come, share your master’s joy” (Matthew 25:23)!

To you, dear parents, the Apostle to the Young addresses these words: “Raise your children with great care in the holy fear of God, because on this depends their health and blessings for your house.” When you presented your sons and daughters to the Church and requested the gift of Baptism for them, you pledged to be the first teachers of your children in the ways of faith and the Church prayed that you would be the best of teachers.

I urge you to renew this promise and make it the guiding principle behind the way you raise your children. Consider these powerful words John Bosco spoke once to a group of children:

Unfortunately, parents are not always good counselors because they are not always guided by what is best for their son’s spiritual welfare, but by worldly considerations... But if your parents live their faith, they are your best counselors because they know you intimately and their advice can be naught but good and well-founded.

Always be guided by what is best: eternal life with God! By your example and teaching, show your children how to follow faithfully after Jesus Christ; to do so, you must first strive to follow Christ before all else.

To you, dear teachers, your exemplar gives this admonition and reminder: "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." If you share in the joys and interests of your students they will know that you love them and will then better learn from you. Do not seek to be simply a teacher, but seek to be a fellow disciple of the Lord, a mentor and a guide to the young.

Before you, my brother priests, the example of Saint John Bosco shines like a great light illuminating the path of authentic ministry to the young souls entrusted to your care. Love these children as your own sons and daughters, thinking always of their true good. Look always to Don Bosco and learn well from him, that you may lead your spiritual children ever closer to Jesus Christ. Let his words spoken near his death be yours: "Tell the boys that I shall be waiting for them all in Paradise."

Dear friends, if each of us follows these profound words of Saint John Bosco our Catholic schools will help transform our nation and, more importantly, will instill the love of God in our children. The character of a society is only as good as the character of its individuals. Let each of us,

then, seek to imitate Christ by being faithful in matters both small and great (cf. Matthew 25:21).

Finally, my friends, I am certain that God is calling one or two of these boys to serve him as priests and one or two of these girls to serve him as nuns. When the Lord calls, we must respond with humble and courageous love! Parents should not be afraid to give their children in service of the Church and young people should all seek to discern the Lord's will for them and to follow it with courage and love, wherever the Lord should call them.

Through our celebration of Catholic Schools Week, may the Lord deepen his grace in each of our lives and help us all to be found faithful to him. May God give us this grace. Amen.