

**Catholic Schools Week  
February 1, 2012**

**St. Viator Chapel  
Catholic Pastoral Center  
Springfield, Illinois**

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

Reverend Monsignor and Fathers, Deacons, Sisters, 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 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. Your work in the Office for Catechesis and through the Diocesan Curia provides a valuable assistance to the pastors, principals, teachers and boards of the Catholic schools through this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, and for your generous and capable assistance I am grateful.

In western society today, faith in Jesus Christ has – in many places - weakened and diminished. As people put greater trust in science and the notion of progress for progress’ sake, they look at Jesus and see in him a clever teacher and a good moralist, perhaps,

but increasingly little else. With the extended family of the Lord, people are asking, “Is he not the carpenter, the son of Mary?” and they take offense at him because his teachings challenge the manner of their lives and the motives of their hearts (Mark 6:3).

Too many people today fail to follow the example of King David who, after recognizing his sin solemnly declared before the Lord: “It is I who have sinned; it is I, the shepherd, who have done wrong” (II Samuel 24:17). David’s subsequent acceptance of the consequences of his sin demonstrates his faith, his trust, in the Lord and led him to sing, “I said, ‘I confess my transgression to the LORD,’ and you took away the guilt of my sin” (Psalm 32:5); weakened though his faith in the Lord had been, it is strengthened through the humble acknowledgement of his sin.

In Baptism, the stain of original sin was washed from our souls and the gift of faith was given to each us. This gift of faith was strengthened, sealed and confirmed by the outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit when we were confirmed. After receiving the Body and the Blood of the Lord in a few moments we will pray that “through this help to eternal salvation true faith may ever increase” in us.<sup>1</sup>

Our Catholic schools exist primarily to explain and expound this faith that is handed on by parents to their children. Our Catholic schools exist to explain the teachings of Jesus Christ – including the ones that cause discomfort – in a manner that demonstrate not only the reasonableness of his teachings, but also the good for our souls contained in his teachings. If our schools lose sight of this important task, if teachers forget that in every subject faith should be included, then our schools lose an essential aspect of what makes a Catholic school Catholic.

It is true, however, that our schools do not exist solely to teach the Catholic faith, but to study the world around us, as well. The other various academic disciplines are present in our schools because through them we can come to a deeper understanding of the mind of God and of his purposes. 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). Faith and academics go, then, as it were, hand in hand; they should not be separated one from the other as they are taught, but should be taught together so

that faith may increase understanding and so understanding may increase faith.

As faith increases, believers of all ages are led to make their own the request we prayed at the beginning of this Mass: “Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart.”<sup>2</sup> Living in this way means that we have placed our lives in the service of God and in the service of our neighbor, all imitation of Christ who gave himself for us.

In all of this, I rely on you to help me assist our schools in handing on the faith of Jesus Christ through a growing understanding of the world he has made and lives lived in humble service. As we continue, then, in this Catholic Schools Week, let us ask the Lord in deepen our faith, to enlighten our minds and to conform our lives ever more closely to his own.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Roman Missal*, Prayer After Communion of the Fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Collect*.