

**Homily for Catholic Schools Week Masses**

**Father McGivney Catholic High School  
Glen Carbon, Illinois  
January 29, 2018**

**Marquette Catholic High School  
Alton, Illinois  
January 29, 2018**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Church  
Decatur, Illinois  
January 30, 2018**

**Saint Anthony High School  
Effingham, Illinois  
January 31, 2018**

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

Reverend Fathers, deacons, consecrated religious, administrators, faculty, staff, students and parents, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good for us to be here during this Catholic Schools Week as we celebrate the role of Catholic Schools in forming the youth of our Church as intentional disciples of Jesus Christ. Over the course of the past year, our diocese has journeyed toward a deeper understanding of what it means to live the discipleship and stewardship way of life through the meetings and consultations of the Fourth Diocesan Synod. During this process, four

aspects of the life of the Church emerged as central pillars of discipleship and stewardship, namely: Hospitality, Prayer, Formation and Service.

With these four pillars of stewardship and discipleship in mind, I immediately saw the connection to this year's theme for Catholic Schools Week: To Learn, Serve, Lead and Succeed. While each part of this theme does not line up exactly with one of the four pillars, I think that they do encompass the spirit of what the members of the synod felt was at the core of being a disciple of our Lord. As such, in order that we might more fully understand the connection of Catholic Schools to forming young disciples of Christ, it is important for us to look at each part of the theme for Catholic Schools Week in this context.

First: To Learn – It should not come as a surprise to any of us that the first of the four values proposed for this week that honors Catholic education would be learning. Since the earliest days of the faith-based education provided by the Church, learning has been at the center of the mission of Catholic Schools. However, I would ask all of you to see this not simply as learning the arts and sciences, but, more importantly, learning how to follow Jesus in your daily lives. If we do this, it is no longer about learning for the sake of knowledge alone; learning becomes central to what

we refer to as formation, the process of coming to follow our Lord more closely by getting to know Him more intimately through the scriptures and through the Tradition of our Catholic Faith.

Second: To Serve - Once we have begun to learn who our Lord is and what it means to follow Him as His disciple, it is only natural that we should see the importance of loving others as Christ loves them. One of the key ways that we show the love of Christ to our neighbors is through service, particularly to those in need by showing charity and justice. Pope Benedict XVI addressed this very point in his Encyclical Letter entitled *Deus Caritas Est*, Latin for "God is Love." In this profound text, he looks at the love that God has for us and therefore the love that we must share with our neighbors. In the opening lines of the second part of the encyclical, Benedict XVI writes that: *Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs.*<sup>1</sup> In these words, our Holy Father points us to the reality that the sort of service to others that is central to our lives as Christ's disciples is rooted in love for our neighbor, who is made in the image of God.

Third: To Lead - On a superficial level, the thought of leading can seem simple, but we must remember that if we are to look at leadership

through the lens of Catholic Education, we must delve more deeply than simply leading in a secular way. We must examine what it means to be a leader who is a disciple of Jesus Christ. If we look at leadership in this light, we must recognize that the goal of our leadership is to bring the people around us to have a deeper relationship with Him. In this way, a parallel between leadership and the sort of hospitality examined by the synod becomes quite apparent.

Fourth: To Succeed - While this aspect of the theme for Catholic Schools week cannot be directly linked to one of the four pillars of discipleship and stewardship, it is in a sense tied to all of them, for ultimately it is the goal of what happens when we live as Christ's disciples and good stewards of the many gifts and talents He has given us. Therefore, let us not look at success as simply doing well in classes or being good at sports or other extracurricular activities. Rather, let us look at it as what happens when we seek to build up the kingdom of God on earth through learning, service and leadership that are rooted in our striving to follow Christ as His disciple. It is then that we will truly have succeeded at what Christ has called each and every one of us to do: to have lived our life for Him. In this way, our fervent desire may be fulfilled that, at the end of

our lives, we may hear our Lord invite us to our Heavenly reward and say to us: *Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy.*<sup>2</sup>

May God give us this grace. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25: 21