

**Homily for Catholic Schools Week Masses
January 28-29, 2019**

**Marquette Catholic High School
Alton, Illinois**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Church
Decatur, Illinois**

**†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 as we celebrate the role of Catholic Schools in forming the youth of our Church into intentional disciples of Jesus Christ.

Beloved parents of our students, you have been given the great privilege of giving your children the gift of life and are charged with the great responsibility of raising them in a life of faith, as you teach them to know and love God. At the same time, our Catholic Schools seek to partner with you in helping your children to learn about our Catholic faith and grow as Christ's disciples in the midst of the world today.

This is why your children are here, because your parents understand the importance of your learning in a Catholic environment. A Catholic

education is about more than simply learning the arts and sciences; rather, at its core, it is about learning how to follow Jesus Christ in your daily lives.

Indeed, it is in Catholic education that we find the answers to life's most basic questions: What is the purpose of our lives? Why should I want to be a good person? What is it that God wants from me? What does it mean to be successful?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I would like to reflect, for a moment, on the last of these questions, "What does it mean to be successful?" When we think about what it means to be happy and successful in our society it is easy to think of money and power and pleasure and influence. This is how the world in which we live measures success. However, our Lord gives us a very different standard with which to measure success. In fact, it is almost the opposite of what the world proposes. Throughout the Gospels, we see our Lord teaching His disciples about what is really important in life. So, too, do Catholic schools today carry on the mission of our Lord through teaching you about what is important and what is not, so that you might follow Christ as His disciple in this life and, like the saints, spend all eternity with Him in the next.

One saint who truly understood what it meant to be a disciple of the Lord is our Blessed Mother, the first and greatest of the disciples. For Catholics, Mary is the embodiment of what it means to live as an intentional disciple of Jesus Christ. However, for many non-Catholics, our Blessed Mother serves as a stumbling block to a relationship with our Lord who do not understand or appreciate her role as the Mother of our Redeemer.

Oddly enough, Mary was also a bit of an obstacle at one point in the spiritual journey of a young Catholic Polish man named Karol Wojtyła. While some of you may recognize this name, all of you would be more familiar with the name he chose when he was elected to lead the Church as our Holy Father: Pope John Paul II. In his memoir, *Gift and Mystery*, he explains that when he left his hometown of Wadowice to study at the Jagiellonian University he felt burdened by the intense devotion to Mary that is common in Poland. He wrote,

I began to question my devotion to Mary, believing that, if it became too great, it might end up compromising the supremacy of the worship owed to Christ.

However, during the horrific Nazi occupation of Kraków in World War II, through reading the book, *True Devotion to Mary*, by Saint Louis de Montfort,

Karol Wojtyła came to recognize that all true devotion to Mary necessarily directs us back to Jesus.¹

This fact is most clearly illustrated through the last recorded words of Mary in the Gospels, *Do whatever he tells you.*² These instructions to the waiters at the wedding feast at Cana sum up the entire role of our Blessed Mother in salvation history, that is to point beyond herself and to focus our attention on her son.

My dear young people, it is my hope that you, like our Blessed Mother, might always act in ways that point those around you to Jesus. For this is what it means to be a disciple of Christ: to live in a way that seeks to lead others to have a relationship with Him. While society might see this as foolish or a waste of time, I assure you that if you follow the example of Mary, and live as an intentional disciple of our Lord, you too will build up great treasure in heaven.

So, today, let us ask Mary our Blessed Mother to continue to intercede for us. May she help all of us to grow in our knowledge of her Son and help us learn how to be His true disciples.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Cf. Weigel, George. *Letters to a Young Catholic*. New York: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2015.

² John 2:5