

Sermon for the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association AGM 2005

“Celebrating our Past, Envisioning our future”

Huntsville, April 29, 2005

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My brothers and sisters in Christ,

What a pleasure it is for me to be with you today, to break open the riches of the Word of God, as we feast upon the Eucharistic Lord, and are strengthened in our vocations to love, to bear Christ to the world and, specifically, to offer thanks for the gift of seventy five years of Catholic education in Ontario and dare to imagine the boundless possibilities of its future.

At the outset, let me say that I am struck by the parallels between our respective offices:

- a. You, as Trustees, have been entrusted by the Catholic community to oversee the education of young people, to be accountable to their parents, to direct and work alongside the educational community of teachers, support staff, administrators and researchers.
- b. I, as all Bishops, have been entrusted by the Holy Father to be a shepherd to the people of God, to work for their good, and the good of all people, as a servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I am to be his ‘voice’ in their midst and to be a centre of unity in this diocese in union with the successor of St. Peter, the centre of unity in the universal Church.

In today's Gospel, Mt 19: 16 – 22, we are presented with the story of the rich young man. Let us reflect briefly upon the meeting between Jesus and the rich young man who inquires of him, "Master, What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The drawing power of this gospel passage lies, perhaps, in the fact that it applies to us all; it expresses the recurring question that shimmers beneath the skin of our daily lives. The lesson for us is clear: Jesus our Teacher considers living the commandments as indispensable for, and necessary to, the young man's happiness and his entering into eternal life.

My friends, in our schools we need to communicate the full truth about Jesus' message in the light of divine revelation. Sometimes we are much more timid than our Lord to accept the commandments as the bases for the numerous conversations we have with the various partners in Catholic education, and our students, about those issues which concern morality. Too often we are so concerned about not imposing ourselves upon others that we treat the 10 commandments as if they were proposals, or another series of recommendations from yet another committee rather than God's life-giving words, addressed to us for our spiritual good.

We need to communicate the full truth to the students, entrusted to us by their parents. But, how are we to educate?

We must, for example:

- 1) Educate in the value of Justice. Do not steal [7th commandment].
- 2) Educate in the value of Truth. Do not bear false witness [8th commandment].
- 3) Educate in the value of Life. Do not kill [5th commandment].
- 4) Educate in the value of Chastity, Abstinence, Fidelity, and Character. There is so much talking today as to how to prevent the spreading of Aids in the world. My friends, I believe that the most effective way to prevent AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases is in promoting and teaching about Chastity, Abstinence, and Fidelity.
 - i. Let us model and call for chastity, abstinence, and fidelity. Teach that married love is generous and life-giving. Support the marriage of others; take seriously your own vows; oppose the mimicry of same-sex marriage.
 - ii. Open our young people up to the “apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment and self-mastery. These are the preconditions of all true freedom”, as we

read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 2223).

- iii. Jesus said in the last Sunday's Gospel, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Teach our young people to love the truth without diluting it, without diluting the message of Christ.
 - iv. Help teachers to be ambassadors of the Good News, keeping in mind that, in matters of faith and morals, the ambassador carries not his/her message, but the message of Christ who sends him or her, through the Church.
- 5) Educate in the value of the primacy of the family. Honor your Father and Mother [4th commandment].
- Help our young people understand, as we read again in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, that the family is not an arbitrary or dispensable or unduly malleable reality, but the universal way by which humanity travels: it is "the original cell of social life" (CCC 2207) that "illuminates other relationships in society" (CCC 2212) and in its interpersonal structure, fecundity and sacrificial way of living, it mirrors the very life of the Trinity (CCC 2205).
 - Help them understand that the family is not a creature of the state, which it precedes. Impress upon them that any benefits which society bestows upon family contributes to the health of the nation and civilization itself.

- 6) We need to educate and remind our young people that we are equal, not because we have a Charter of Rights, but because God has created us equal, in His own image. We are his children. This is the highest dignity of every human being, regardless the color of our skin, the nation we come from and the language we speak. We read in the book of Genesis that all people and nations are equal and share equal dignity in the eyes of God (See Tower of Babel and Table of Nations Gen 11).
- 7) Our challenge is to teach our young people about God through academic subjects. Archbishop Philip Pocock said, “A Catholic school is one in which God, His Truth, His Life are integrated into the entire syllabus, curriculum and life of the school” (Pastoral Letter “What is a catholic school”, March 1971). We must never forget that our Catholic schools are different from the public schools, nor should we downplay the benefits that our system adds to the fabric of our society, to the mosaic of cultures and nationalities that is Ontario.
- 8) Teach Gospel values, not diluted by today’s culture of relativism or subjectivism. As we all know, relativism is becoming rampant today. Our Holy Father Benedict XVI

said, just recently, that our secular society tends today to establish a “Dictatorship of relativism.”

9) Be rooted in the magisterium of the Church. Keep updating yourself in the doctrine of the Church, cling to the authentic, solid doctrine, and disregard any subjective or relativistic interpretation of the truth.

10) Finally we need to prepare from our schools, leaders for tomorrow. Leaders rooted in Gospel Values; leaders capable to walk the talk, capable to go the extra mile and turn the other cheek. We need to prepare leaders capable to stand up for their faith, and teach others to do the same. Leaders who serve in humility and find their strength through their prayer life and the sacraments.

The young person’s encounter with Christ ends with him leaving, grieving and clinging to his possessions rather than following the Master. Like the Lutheran theologian of note, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, (I am paraphrasing), ‘there is no cheap grace.’ When Christ calls us ‘he bids us come and die’.

Teach our young people that there is a cost to discipleship. The Teacher invites us today, as he invited that rich young man

2000 years ago, “come follow me.” Individually, and collectively as partners in catholic education, we need to take stock of what ‘possessions’ weigh us down and hold us back from responding with a generous heart; “ here I am Lord lead the way.”

Dear Trustees, as people entrusted in different and complementary ways with tasks of overseeing the challenges of Catholic education, the cost to us will be significant. We must lead from the front for there is no such thing as leading from behind. Brothers and sisters, the future of our Catholic schools is in our hands. If we pull together, if we strengthen the co-operation between the family, the school and the Church, and most of all, if our Catholic schools remain truly Catholic, I think that nobody, not even the government will ever dream to abolish them. But, if they don’t remain truly Catholic, if they don’t remain united to the authentic Gospel teaching of the Church, for sure one day or another they will disappear. That is what I meant when I said: the future of our Catholic schools is in our hands. As we celebrate our past with pride and look into the future with optimism, let us dare to educate for eternity.