

Opening Mass for the Presidents and Principals of Catholic Schools 2016

August 22, 2016—Good morning. Allow me first to say a word of gratitude to Superintendent Dan Ferris for his very kind invitation to offer Mass with you this morning. It is a pleasure to be with all of you, the leaders of Catholic education in our Diocese.

His name is Johnny and since he had just gotten his driving permit he decided to ask his father if they could discuss the use of the family car. His father took him into his study and said, “Johnny, I will make a deal with you. Bring your grades up at school, study the Bible a little bit, get your hair cut, and we will discuss it.”

About a month later, the boy came back again with the same question about using the car, and his father says this: “Now, son, I am very proud of you. You brought up your grades, you studied the Bible diligently, but you didn’t get your hair cut!”

The young man waited a moment and then replied, “I have been thinking about that, Dad. You know that Samson had long hair and Moses had long hair and we all know that even Jesus had long hair.”

To which the father replied, “Johnny, you are right! And, we also know that everywhere they went, they walked.”

As Johnny’s father pointed out with such consequence to his son, a lot has changed since the days of Our Blessed Lord—but, a lot has also remained the same!

But, if Our Blessed Lord excelled at anything in His public life, he excelled at being a great and inspiring teacher. Everywhere He went, with every opportunity and on every occasion that He could find, He preached and taught the message of His Father. Nothing illustrates that more than the Gospel we just heard [Matthew 23:13-22]. With those challenging words to the religious teachers of His day, Jesus reminds us that to be true agents of the message He brought—especially in our roles as Catholic educators and administrators—we must be authentic in our Catholic faith and sincere in our commitment to be who we are called to be for those who come to us.

And the voice of the Divine Master so many centuries later still rings clear today through his Church, and in a particular way through us as we prepare to begin another year and to give thanks for the privilege that is ours to have a treasure in our midst, our very own schools where the message of the Savior and His heavenly Father are taught every single day—not just by what we say, but most importantly, by who we are!

You know, just like those first Apostles and disciples who heard Jesus speak and spread that lifesaving message to others, so now it is our duty and our privilege to foster the growth of the Catholic faith in our youngest parishioners and students and to give them a glimpse of the heavenly gift that came to us in that Divine Rabbi from Nazareth.

That is the reason why our Catholic schools exist, the mission that is ours being to bring the Gospel message to the world around us and to empower the youngest among us to hear the Good Lord through us and to follow Him.

In just a few days, the world will watch with awe and admiration as our beloved Holy Father Pope Francis canonizes a woman who inspires us all, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Her work with the poorest of the poor and her outspoken message of the sanctity of all human life inspires us still.

She was once asked by a reporter, “Mother, how do you judge success in the work that you do?”

After a brief pause, Mother looked at the reporter and answered, “The Lord never spoke about success. He simply asked us to live and be faithful and that is what He asks of us still.”

My friends, as we begin this new academic year, let us take the good advice of the Saint of the slums and go forth to our schools to LOVE and be FAITHFUL to the Lord, and give thanks for the PRIVILEGE that we bear, to continue to make our schools beacons of faith and hope that burn brightly where one thing REMAINS THE SAME now and always ... as Our Blessed Lord himself, teaches and guides us still.

God love you.