

Learning to be an Ambassador of Christ

One of the joys of my priesthood so far is having had the honor and privilege to serve in four parishes with a school. This has allowed me to visit classrooms, read stories to kids, have lunches with them, pitch in kickball but also see so many amazing things happen that remind me of the good that is inside of us all. For instance I remember being on the playground once and hearing one group invite a person over who seemed to be alone into their game. At Mass, it's also common for older students to have a buddy system with younger students so they feel more comfortable. And then there is the daily formation with prayer, a weekly school Mass, and special devotions such as the May Crowning and putting the faith into action through service.

I try to emphasize in my priesthood and remind myself every day in my own ongoing formation that there is no such thing as a part-time Christian. We have to work hard to become saints. This means that if we pray and go to Mass and know the content of the faith, but don't live it out through how we treat others, or if we say "my work is my prayer" and are heavily into the service but don't pray or frequently miss Mass, something is missing. We aren't called to just be nice people. We are called to be saints.

Having been now at Saint Joe's for 4 years, I can honestly say that our school does so much to help children understand this. Really, the philosophy of our school boils down to the following that we communicate to every family:

Evangelizing: Our parish school possesses an evangelizing attitude that is inherent in our words, actions, and ministry reflecting that all of us are children of God created in God's image and likeness.

Life Long Learning: Our parish school is dedicated to growing in our knowledge of Jesus through formal and informal education throughout our lives. We embrace opportunities for continual learning and strive for achievement in all areas of learning and life.

One in Christ: Our parish school is strengthened by diversity, a product of God's creative wisdom. By expressing and utilizing our unique individual gifts, we are cultivating the Kingdom of God on earth.

Prayer and Worship: Our parish school values prayer and worship as a sacred means through which we deepen our relationship with God and one another. Our expressions of faith embrace tradition and a relevant message for 21st century Christians.

Respect for All People: Our parish school is committed to God's commandment to love one another. We welcome and engage all who are served by our ministry. We interact with people, whether within or outside our school community, in a respectful, welcoming, and caring manner.

Service: Our parish school values and promotes service in living out our faith both locally and in our greater community. God calls and empowers us to use our gifts and talents for the benefit of others, especially those who are most in need.

It's also been so wonderful to see the energy in our school. We've added a preschool in the past two years which has been thriving. Having sat in on classes and seen what goes on in our classrooms, I can also tell you Mrs. Kelly Roche our amazing principal and the teachers care so much about their vocation. Our students really get a great academic formation to help them in finding their vocations, but also the spiritual foundation that will help them not only discern what God is calling them to do with their lives, but help them to become saints.

This weekend, I am honored to celebrate with the school our graduation Mass Sunday afternoon as our eighth grade students turn a page and celebrate the ending of one chapter and the start of something new. God has great plans for them, and thanks to the education of the mind, heart and soul they have received here at Saint Joseph's, I have no doubt they will be so much better prepared to follow their dreams and achieve them.

As the school year winds down, I just want to first and foremost thank you as parents for taking your vocation seriously. Children do not come with an instruction manual, but parents learn along the way how to live out their vocations. Through the example you've set and all you've done by helping your children to learn the faith and how to live it out and what matters most in life, you've done so much to put them on the right track.

I'd also like to thank all who have said "yes" to the vocation of being a teacher. I stand in front of a congregation each week and try to give folks something to think about in a homily. A Saint Joseph's teacher stands before a group for hours each day trying to get a child year old interested in adding and subtracting, fractions, how flowers grow from the ground, what a rock is, who the Trinity is and who the saints are, and also teaches them about love of neighbor. Every. Single. Day. Frequently when I walk Emmett or go to the office early or late or on the weekend, I'll see a teacher coming in as well to get some work done. What unsung heroes we are blessed with both at Saint Joseph's and in our country who work so hard to help our children.

Lastly, I'd invite you to consider our school if you are looking at what to do for your children for next school year, and to get the word out. As our sign has been built through the generosity of so many purchasing pavers and we near a future electronic component to it, one of the things that is so nice about it is it communicates. A steeple or cross does not say we are a Catholic Church let alone have a school. The sign as people drive by will remind people of who we are, and hopefully invite them to look a little more deeply. So much good stuff happens in our parish, and what a great school we have. So consider taking a tour, calling up our school for more information, and letting friends and family know about Saint Joseph's school.

As we celebrate the Ascension of the Lord this week, we are reminded that all of us are called to be the hands, face and voice of Jesus in the world as His followers. Thank you to the Saint Joseph's Class of 2019 for taking that commission so seriously, and to all of our great teachers and parents who help them and so many children along the way.

God bless,

Fr. Paul