

Ordinary 5-A: Friday

Catholic Educators' Conference

9 February 2018

Dear brother priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, and dear educators in the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese and of British Columbia:

Introduction

Before offering a reflection on today's Gospel, it is more than a duty, it is a heartfelt pleasure, to express my sincere gratitude to you – every educator in our Catholic schools – for embracing your supernatural calling. You are all trained professionals, but you are more than that: you are witnesses to Jesus Christ the Teacher who is your inspiration and ever-present Companion in carrying out your responsibilities. Thank you for so generously, enthusiastically and often sacrificially embracing the apostolate of Catholic education. But, even more than my thanks, I owe you my admiration.

Gatherings such as this serve to reinforce that your charism, your gift of educating young people, is a great blessing to society and the Church. Despite the hardships and sometimes even the setbacks, I do hope that you are as grateful to the good Lord as I am for gracing you with this vocation of forming tomorrow's citizens and saints in body, mind and spirit, teaching them an appreciation for beauty, a passion for the truth and a love for goodness.

Shaped by its two-millennia tradition of handing on the Good

News from one generation to the next, the Catholic Church has a vision of education and what is sometimes called “the good life.” Remember that you play an irreplaceable role in forming the minds and hearts of the young so that they may experience “the fullness of life” (cf. Jn 10:10) that Jesus came to give us. Catholic education is not “value-free” or neutral. On the contrary, the Church places so many of her human and financial resources in schooling because we are convinced that an education imbued with the truth of the Gospel best equips our young people to lead virtuous and happy lives which ultimately lead to their maturation in eternal life. Educators truly are “life-givers.”

Today's Gospel

In the Gospel we have just read, St. Mark sheds light on Jesus, the Divine Physician whose compassion on every kind of infirmity is a sign that “God has visited his people” (Lk 7:16; cf. Mt 4:24) and consequently that the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

Particularly striking in the cure of the deaf-mute is the sheer physicality of his miraculous encounter with Jesus. The people wanted him just to lay his hand upon the man. But, like a good teacher, the Lord sized up the situation before him – a teachable moment – and so decided to touch, both physically and spiritually, the precise places of the man’s woundedness: his ears and his tongue. Again, like a good teacher, we can say that he found the precise way to “educate” the man; that is, to

draw him out of his misery. He used physical “signs” that the man would understand and follow what he was doing.

But Jesus also spoke. This was a kind of “acted-out” sacrament of tangible actions accompanied by word.

After “looking up to heaven” and speaking in Aramaic, which Mark the Evangelist retains in his account, Jesus’ “*Ephphatha*,” that is, “be opened” (Mk 7:34), he restored the man’s hearing and ability to speak plainly.

Several layers of meaning – or even “lessons,” and I can use that word in this environment! – are present here. Let me briefly suggest just three of them that can be gleaned from the Gospel narrative.

1. Pray with and for your Students

First, note that when Jesus was about to work the healing, he directly sought his relationship with the Father. The account relates that “looking up to heaven, he sighed” (Mk 7:34). Before performing the miracle he prayed to God his Father. Prayer preceded the healing action of Jesus as he looked up to heaven. The power that healed the deaf-mute came from Jesus’ action, but only after his prayer to the Father.¹

In like manner, in all you do as educators the real fruitfulness of your activity, your success, will come because you have prayed *with* and

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (14 December 2011).

for those whom you teach. In fact, such prayer is essential to your ministry as educators. That's why we pray at the beginning of and during the school day. I would suggest even more to you. From time to time throughout the day implore the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that what you do will always be grounded in his inspiration, continue with his saving help and come to completion in him.

2. Open Your Students to God and the World

A second lesson we can take away is that all of us – teachers and students alike – are threatened by loneliness and isolation. We yearn for God because of the restlessness he has implanted in our hearts, but we often don't know how to calm that desire. In a certain way, the deaf-mute also reminds us of those who are isolated from God and from others as well. In his kindness, Jesus restores to the man the capacity to open himself to God and to others.

Educators, too, in their care for everyone in our common home, are called to help their students open themselves to the fullness of reality – to its grandeur and magnificence, which today is so frequently undermined by a pessimism which treats the past as only a series of oppressions and the present as full of dangers. Instead, I hope that you will help our young people to discover the working of God in their lives and to experience his closeness, and that you will lead them to appreciate the value of community and of serving others.

3. Teach the Art of Listening

A third and last lesson from today's Gospel that I will mention touches upon the art of listening. By curing the deaf-mute, Jesus is telling us how wonderful it is that we have ears, above all the interior ears of the heart, that are open to listening to others and to God. Not to hear external or internal voices is rightly called a deathly silence.

As educators, you have the mission of instructing those entrusted to you in the art of listening: to one another, to the cultural, spiritual and moral heritage of the past and to the voices of the present, above all, to the voice of God who addresses them in friendship.

This, I know, is no easy task today. In a world so noisy, so non-reflective, one of the greatest lessons your students can learn from you is how to listen, to interpret, to ponder, to develop a sense of wonder and delight in God and his world which, as the poet says, "is charged with the grandeur of God."

Teach your students how to listen well and you will teach them how to act generously. In an authentic Christian life, dear colleagues, the listening which is prayer and the action which is directed to others are always be deeply united. Prayer that does not lead you to practical action for one's brothers and sisters, especially when they are marginalized, abandoned or in difficulty, is a sterile and incomplete prayer. But, in the same way, when action is attentive only to doing, we forget the

centrality of Jesus Christ.² He became man so that we, rendered inwardly deaf by sin, might be able to hear God's voice.³

Conclusion

As we continue our Mass, let us ask the Lord to give us a vision of learning that will open our hearts and those of our students so that we can all be like the crowd in the Gospel who were “astounded beyond measure, saying ‘He has done everything well, he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak’” (Mk 7:37). Today, through you, dear friends, Jesus continues to open the hearts and minds of his young people to his friendship and the “fullness of life” he alone can bring.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

² Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at Vespers (25 January 2007).

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Angelus (9 September 2012).