

Our Lady of Lourdes

65th Anniversary of the Founding of Notre Dame RSS

Notre Dame Regional Secondary School

6 February 2018

Dear Father Garry, Father Richard, Archbishop's Representative;
brother priests, dear administrators, staff, students, alumni, parents and
friends of Notre Dame Regional Secondary School:

Introduction

The good Lord gathers us today to celebrate together this Eucharist as an act of thanksgiving for the gift of Notre Dame Regional Secondary School to the life of the Church and the community for 65 years. It was on February 11, 1953, the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, that the school was opened, under the direction of the Sisters of Charity of Halifax, to meet the needs of the growing number of young Catholics from ten parishes in East Vancouver and Burnaby (Corpus Christi, Holy Cross, Immaculate Heart of Mary, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Helen's, St. Jude's, St. Mary's, St. Theresa's, Our Lady of Sorrows, Sacred Heart).

So, on this festive occasion, it's certainly fitting that we take a moment to recall with the gratitude the spirit and dedication of the school's founders: the Sisters and first lay teachers, the parents who sacrificed to provide a Catholic high school education for their children, the pastors and parishioners who generously supported the fledgling school. And this spirit has been kept alive through the years, most recently in the phased-construction of your beautiful facility, to which so

many contributed their expertise, time, resources and, above all, their prayers. A great legacy of the best that Catholic education has to offer, steadily been built up over the years. And so, it is certainly fitting that we all express our gratitude to those who have played a role in establishing Notre Dame on its firm foundation, a foundation that is strong because it is built on Jesus Christ and on his saving mission. He is the reason for this school; the unseen but ever-present teacher in the classrooms; the model for the faculty and the inspiration for the students.

Notre Dame is proud to be a Catholic school, which seeks to educate the whole student — the body, in its outstanding athletic program; the mind, in its challenging academics whose foundation is a passion for knowledge and truth; and the spirit, in its campus ministry, religion classes and the Christian atmosphere which imbues its activities and leads students to the love of God and neighbour. And it accomplishes these goals in an atmosphere of community, where each person – whether staff or student or parent – is accorded their full dignity and recognized as necessary for building up the school.

No one has expressed the animating Catholic spirit of Notre Dame than your principal, Mr. DesLauriers. Under “The Principal’s Message,” on the school website, he writes: “Our Catholic faith is the umbrella under which every aspect of school life is connected. It is the force behind building and sustaining an effective and lasting community. It

permeates the important virtues and values that are taught, modelled, instilled and emulated. It is the road map we need to find the way to our final home of destiny.”¹

In today’s Liturgy, as you will have noticed, we are celebrating the Mass of Mary, Notre Dame, under her title of “Our Lady of Lourdes.” How blessed we are that this school has been placed under her care and her guidance!

First a brief comment on the Gospel and then a word about Lourdes.

Gospel

Mary, “the Mother of Jesus” (Jn 2:1), appears at the beginning of John’s Gospel as one who intercedes before her Son. Here she turns to him to make known the embarrassing situation of the young newly-married couple: “They have no wine” (Jn 2:3), she says to him. More than a mere observation, it contains a request: “Won’t you do something about this?” She trusts in Jesus’ goodness, that he will take care of the newlyweds so that they will not be ashamed.

She knows that Jesus has no wine available. He didn’t bring any extra jars with him. It is, therefore, very likely that she is asking him for a miracle. And her request is all the more daring since until that moment

¹ http://www.ndrs.ca/content/view/about-principals_message.

Jesus hadn't worked any miracles. But she had faith in her Son; and therefore, she pushed him.

Mary's faith, like ours, was not always easy. It was tested. From the appearance of the Angel in Nazareth when she uttered that first "*fiat*," her "yes" to the Angel Gabriel, indicating her willingness to put aside all her life plans to become the Mother of the Messiah, right down to the final "*fiat*" offered at the foot of the Cross, when she accepted her helplessness in preventing the Crucifixion, Mary's faith cost her a lot.

And here now, in Cana, Jesus' response to his Mother's request seems far from encouraging: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). Yet Mary does not withdraw her request. She is persevering and persistent because she knows Jesus. "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

Because of her faith, Mary was able to look beyond the this seeming rejection of Jesus. She knows her Son, and does not doubt that he will do what is right in the situation. And he does. The miracle of the water turned into wine is an answer to the perseverance of her faith, and the festivities could continue.

When Jesus changes the water in the six enormous jars into the best yet that the guests had tasted, he not only saves the couple from the humiliating embarrassment of appearing careless in their planning or stingy in their hospitality, but he reveals that, with his presence, a time

of great abundance has arrived – a time of an abundance of God’s love and joy.

In this account of Jesus’ very first miracle Mary is presented as someone who trusts in Jesus, that he will answer prayers with kindness.²

Thus the Evangelist John wants to stir up in us that same kind of trust in Jesus, that same kind of faith. That he accompanies us in our everyday and ordinary lives; that he has an interest in *who* we are and who we are becoming; that he is always with us, and always ready to take us by the hand and lift us up when we fall.

Lourdes

Down through history Mary has continued to intercede for us. And, from time to time, her accompanying us takes the form of an apparition. Such was the case at Lourdes when she appeared to the Bernadette some 160 years ago.

Here Mary smiled on the young girl, since she was pleased with her simplicity and faith. In the course of the apparition of March 3, 1858, Bernadette saw the smile of Mary. This smile was, in fact, the first response that Our Lady gave to the young visionary who didn’t recognize her at first. This was how Mary revealed her tenderness, the

² Cf. John Paul II, General Audience (6 May 1998), 3.

same tenderness and care she showed for the young newlyweds at Cana.

At Notre Dame you are not visionaries like Bernadette but “Jugglers.” You all know the medieval French legend of the poor juggler who wanted to offer something to the Mother of God but felt he had nothing worthy. Then he thought of his talent of juggling and performed a spectacular feat before her statue. Mary accepted that offering, smiling down upon him.

That smile, which she undoubtedly also showed at Cana when Jesus performed the miracle she asked for, is waiting for us today.³ Mary wants to intercede with Jesus for us, especially in times of sadness and difficulty. All we have to do is ask with a sincere heart.

Conclusion

As we celebrate 65 years of the grace of Notre Dame, let us pray that Mary will smile upon all the school’s endeavours and its entire community. She knows what you need and she will take care of you, interceding with Jesus on your behalf, as she continues to whisper to you about her Son: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5).

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB

Archbishop of Vancouver

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at Lourdes (15 September 2008).