

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 8 November 2020

Scriptures: Wisdom 6:12-16; 1 Thess. 4:13-14; Matthew 25:1-13

In the first reading from the Old Testament, the ancient writer tells us how bright a gift is wisdom, and how much God wishes to impart it to us.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us a story to urge us to become wise.

So, the theme we find in our scripture readings for today is the theme of wisdom, which consequently suggests to us the prerequisite theme of education.

Every January 1st, year after year, the pope, on behalf of the whole Church, issues a "World Day of Peace" message. Some years ago, the theme selected by the pope was "Educating Young People in Justice and Peace". That theme has remained a yearly pursuit in universities, colleges, high schools, and elementary schools.

The theme engages an urgent need in the world today, more perhaps than ever before. The need is to listen to and enhance the important role of new generations in the realization of the common good, and in the affirmation of a just and peaceful social order where fundamental human rights can be fully expressed and realized.

In fact, there is a duty incumbent upon the present generation to prepare future generations, and to create for them the conditions that will all enable these future generations to express freely and responsibly the urgency for a new world.

The Church welcomes young people and sees them as the sign of an ever-promising springtime, and holds out Jesus to them as the model of love who makes all things new.

This is precisely the mission of Catholic education and the Church itself.

I will give one recent example: her name is Sister Cecilia. She is a 43 year old religious nun. Currently she is the coordinator for teacher training in the Huila Province of Angola. She describes a Catholic primary school in the town of Juao de Almeida. It has eight permanent classrooms, 138 teachers, but 7,348 students. Class sessions are held in the streets, under trees, and elsewhere. Throughout Sister Cecilia's province, there are 700,000 students, but only 19,000 teachers. 40% hold classes outside under trees. Moreover, only 76% of the province's children are registered in a school. More than one million aged 6 to 17 have no school whatsoever. In some areas, only 38% are in school. 27% of all teenagers are illiterate.

Back here in Fairfax, while historically we certainly had challenges, we were most grateful for our accomplishments and success. How successfully were we with the students of our St. Rita School? Sadly, and wrongly, our school closed in 2015. We are forever grateful to all the teachers and staff who served the students, their parents, and our parishioners for so many years.

When we received the results from the 2014-2015 nationwide test scores, we were overjoyed to learn that taken together as a class, our 8th grade students had reached an academic level equal to somewhere between a high school senior and a university freshman. That was outstanding. We were so enormously proud.

"Resplendent and unfading is wisdom, and she is readily perceived by those who love her, and found by those who seek her. She hastens to make herself known in anticipation of their desire; whoever watches for her at dawn shall not be disappointed." (Wisdom 6:12-13)