

Living the Spirit  
Faith and Education

**Faith and Education**

For the Church every year is a year for educating its members in the faith. It is a task given it by Christ Himself. He sent His apostles and disciples into the whole world to teach their brothers and sisters all that He had taught them. To this work He added the command to baptize and observe all He taught – which means He added to education the duty of actual living of what is learned. The Church, therefore, has the right to educate or teach as an integral part of its mission as a revealed religion.

Each Fall we begin again a school year. In the ministry of the Church we take up the task to teach the good news of being Catholic to our children and youth. We establish our schools and sacrifice in a sometimes hostile world to sustain them. This work is truly a part of evangelization. Many members of the Church dedicate themselves, intentionally or otherwise, to this great work.

I have written on the theme of education in many ways. Here I would want to encourage parents to realize that they are the primary teachers of their children. Society expects them to take an active part in this. However, we do find a steady intrusion of government in this duty. Governments certainly must help and aid in the work of education for the civil life of the children and youth. Still, the choice must be that of the parents, and in adult life of persons themselves.

The work of parents may not include formal education – it does in such ventures as home-schooling –but education involves more than the formal learning found in our schools. The faith is learned by the example of parents living it. It is learned by the use of very Catholic aids in the home. What home should lack a crucifix? What home should not be a place of our Catholic feasts and fasts? Of grace before meals? Of living faith?

In the best of Catholic culture or way of life, many cooperate in the work of education. Those who have means help build our schools and sustain them by their generous support. Many help the parents and teachers actively involved in education in the faith by their example of what a good life means. Some find ways to volunteer just where they are needed.

I believe we need to be grateful to all our teachers – in both Catholic and public schools. Here we are in a delicate situation. Catholic teachers in our parish or diocesan schools find themselves called to give a public example of their faith. They must live as believers. The Church expects no less of them. We all recognize they are also called to make financial sacrifices, which arise out of the inability of the Church to meet all the needs of a modern education, as it would otherwise like.

Catholic teachers in our public schools can be a great asset to both the schools in which they teach and to the purpose of the faith itself. While no actual teaching of religion is allowed, there are many ways of teaching the acceptable human values that are more than exclusive matters of religion. I think of how teachers can give example of

kindness, of patience and of love to their children reflective of their own love of God. I think of values such as honesty, respect for individuals as children of God, both adult and youth.

At times there are other ways of bringing something of our religious culture to our youth. I always recall a conference I attended years ago. There a Miss Murphy, who made clear she was not a Catholic, told of how she simply felt she had to refer to facts that seemed religious to answer her students' questions. Her example was with Moby Dick, where the character is named Ahab. Asked where did he get such a name, Miss Murphy noted she had to tell the student that it was a name from the Bible.

Today we should find ways of allowing something of our religious culture in our schools. I know there are those who see otherwise. But perhaps we can show how there is more to Christmas than a winter holiday or Frosty the Snow man. Science need not be anti-religious to suggest something of our belief in an Omnipotent God. History need not delete every reference to the good of religious belief, while emphasizing extreme failures of persons using religion. Some are called to live their faith by making sure the political world in which we live does not compromise our rights. In our nation we have the first amendment, and we must preserve it! Our bishops have been insistent in this by having a Fortnight for Freedom observance in these last two years.

I would like to ask you to support our teachers in whatever way you can. Give thanks to those who actively volunteer in so many ways. I also ask you to be grateful to those who volunteer to teach in our religious education programs. I think it a good deed to do what one can do to renew and restore the dignity of those who teach in places and areas where religious education seems forgotten.

#### **Personal Reflections**

Since these inserts are meant to replace conversations, I take the opportunity now to share my own personal thoughts. As I look back on my life, I find that many of the happiest times were times of learning and teaching. I was one of those who loved school. I know there are more of such creatures than are willing to admit it. I still reverence the memory of the Sisters who taught me in my early days. I admired the priests who taught me in high school – enough to want to be like them. I treasure the great friends that shared the experience of education with me, both in schools, the seminary, in my doctoral studies and in my teaching assignments.

While it is customary to look on teaching as a kind of sacrificial occupation, it is and should be a rewarding one. Not every day or in every way, of course. When one realizes there are those whose lives you have touched, in ways unheralded or perhaps even unintended, what spiritual joy one has. The Lord surely gives His blessing to those who learn, and to those who teach. He has done so for me. And for you, dear reader?

*God love you always!*

*Monsignor David Morrison*

***I have chosen to preside at the School Mass on Friday, September 12th as a suitable means of noting my anniversary. My priestly ministry began with a teaching assignment. For that I was most grateful. I learned a great deal from my students. I believe that they learned from me. The center of the learning was to know Christ, present in so many ways. To Christ, the High Priest, I give thanks for years of happy ministry. Pray for our priests who work so hard to support our education programs.***