

Father O'Connor's Homily for 28 January 2024
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time-B
Catholic Schools Week

Deuteronomy 18: 15-20
1 Corinthians 7: 32-25
Mark 1: 21-28

To our Saint Joseph Parish School families, our dedicated teachers, staff and volunteers – and those of our area Catholic colleges, high schools and elementary schools – happy Catholic Schools Week!

To all of you, our Saint Joseph and Nativity Parish Family members – thank you for your commitment to and support for Catholic education.

This Sunday from 12:00 Noon until 1:30 PM, Saint Joseph Parish School, under the leadership of our principal, Mrs. Amy Makruski, will be welcoming you to an Open House. There will be tours to showcase what our gem-of-a-school has to offer. And our Knights of Columbus will be hosting “Coffee and Donuts” for you in our School Gymnasium.

Saint Joseph Parish School has received designation from the State of Ohio as a STEM school – with a curriculum emphasizing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, in a Catholic learning environment, preparing our students for the job-market of this 21st century.

Whether or not you have school-age children, please come and see our/your school.

All students are now eligible for up to a full-tuition scholarship through Ohio EdChoice and/or local tuition assistance. A Catholic education is now more affordable than ever. What a blessing we have right here!

And a way that all who pay taxes to the State of Ohio can help our Catholic schools financially – at no cost at all to the donor – is through the Angel Scholarship Fund. Contributions to the Angel Scholarship Fund provide tuition assistance for students who attend a Catholic school, K-12. And donors may receive a tax credit of up to \$750 for single persons – and up to \$1500 for married couples who are filing jointly – against their Ohio State tax liability.

In other words, the State of Ohio allows you to “spend” some of the state income taxes – that you must pay anyway – to provide tuition assistance for students in our Catholic schools – including right here at Saint Joseph Parish School in Amherst.

And some more good news: the Angel Scholarship Fund 2023 deadline has been extended up until 15 April 2024. Thank you to all of you who have already signed-up.

Today's Gospel opens with these words: "Then they came to Capernaum, and on the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and taught." Notice that this is Mark 1: 21-28. This Gospel begins with Jesus teaching.

But then the class gets lively. "In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit. He cried out, 'I know who you are: the Holy One of God!'" The unclean spirit was the only one there who really knew who Jesus was. And so Jesus says, "Quiet! Come out of him!" And the spirit left him. "All were amazed... 'A new teaching with authority.'"

The word "disciple" means "a learner." Catholic Schools Week celebrates the graced opportunity that we have as disciples of Jesus to be lifelong learners of the way of life that He has taught us.

Look at some of the opportunities that we have right here in the life of our parishes: Saint Joseph Parish Day School, Saint Joseph Parish School of Religion, Holy Ground Youth Ministry for those in grades 6-12, sacramental programs to enable parents to be even better first-teachers of their children in the ways of faith, RCIA for adults desiring to learn about or to strengthen their Catholic faith, and other opportunities for our ongoing faith formation, no matter what our age.

We are all disciples of Jesus, the Master Teacher, and we help each other along the way.

A young math student was asked by his teacher to recite the multiplication table of the nines. He stumbled all over the place. When he finished, he said to his teacher: "I didn't do very well with the nines, but go ahead and ask me the table of the sevens. I'm a tiger with the sevens!" And his teacher helped him to become a tiger with the nines too. God bless our teachers who help us to grow and develop.

Sometimes people ask me if it is easy to do what I am doing right now, standing in front of you and speaking to you without any notes. The truth is that when something difficult looks easy, it is usually because there is a lot of hard work and practice behind it.

When I was in school and had to read out-loud in front of the class, I stumbled all over the words. When I was in the seminary that was a big worry for me because I knew that part of being a priest was not only reading the Scriptures in public but also preaching about them. And this frightened me.

In my seminary days, I was also an organist and I played for events in the seminary, in parishes and at Saint John's Cathedral for Diocesan events. I was a tiger in the choir loft. But in the front of the church I was scared to death.

Shortly before I was ordained, I was taking a preaching course at Saint Mary Seminary with Dr. Michael Williams. One of our assignments each week was to record a practice homily and turn it in to him. He would then play someone's practice homily during class and we would all critique it.

Then my turn came up. The class listened to my homily and a few people began laughing when it was finished. Dr. Williams then said to me in front of everyone: "You are a fine organist, but when it comes to preaching..." and there was a long pause.... "This is the finest homily that anyone in this class has preached so far."

My teacher, Dr. Williams, had given me one of the most appreciated gifts that I have ever received: he not only taught me how to preach but, even more importantly, he told me that he believed that I could.

And I am still grateful today for this fine teacher!

We all have been richly blessed by God with the gifts of time, talent and treasure. Some things come to us easily – and we are tigers – while other things take a lot of hard work and encouragement with the help of other people.

Today, let us thank the good Lord, the Master Teacher, for our teachers and our schools and, of course, for our Catholic faith.

Happy Catholic Schools Week, everyone!