

St. Joseph Catholic Academy
Monday, October 17, 2011
Mass for the Dedication of the School – Homily

I recently read an article about the alumni reunion for a private academy in New England. It was founded in 1926 by a group of lay members of the Episcopal Church.

You may be thinking that it is way too early to start thinking about an alumni reunion for St. Joseph Catholic Academy here in Boalsburg. After all, we are here today to formally celebrate the liturgical rite of blessing and dedication of the school.

You are probably right. It may be premature to think about alumni reunions. Yet, some of the observations of the alumni from that academy in New England caught my attention.

For example, in describing what brought many of the alumni to attend that academy, the news article states that many shared stories of themselves as young persons who needed what their hometown schools could not offer.

A former teacher of that academy said that it was quite awe-inspiring to have been part of that educational experience. He said, “We took these kids and made young adults out of them, with love, self-discipline, and encouragement.”

The mission statement of that academy in New England says that it was founded to teach students of modest means. One alumnus noted that during his time there they used any extra money to lower the tuition costs for families if they needed it.

Finally, another alumnus spoke about their determination to keep alive their alma mater’s spirit of service to others.

By now you may be thinking that it sounds like there are a lot of similarities shared by that academy in New England and St. Joseph Catholic Academy.

According to our mission statement, Saint Joseph's Catholic Academy is a college preparatory high school and faith community, committed to the well being of students and their families.

Through excellence in scholarship, personal discipline, accountability and integrity, Saint Joseph's seeks to form the next generation of leaders.

Saint Joseph's provides an environment that fosters a life of faith and academic excellence grounded in Christian spirituality, and the Gospel values of integrity, respect, service and justice.

Saint Joseph's Catholic Academy serves God by serving students, their families and the community.

Those principles and values contained in St. Joseph Catholic Academy are significant insofar as they reflect the challenging, but encouraging, words of St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians. St. Paul exhorts the Colossians and his words exhort us here at St. Joseph Catholic Academy

- To put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience
- To bear with one another and forgive one another
- To put on love which is the bond of perfection
- To allow the peace of Christ to control your hearts
- To allow the word of Christ to dwell in you
- To allow wisdom that is taught be reflected in your gratitude to God
- To do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

How is it possible for all of us who are in this project together of creating, of building up, and of sustaining St. Joseph Catholic Academy?

The answer is clearly stated in

- The Gospel reading in which Jesus tells us as he told his disciples after his resurrection, “receive the Holy Spirit”
- The reading from Sirach in which we are exhorted to praise and bless the God of all who
 - Has done wonders on earth
 - Fosters growth from the beginning
 - Fashions everything according to his will
 - Grants each of us a wise heart
 - Abides with us in peace

All of these words from Sacred Scripture are meant to inspire us today as we celebrate the blessing and dedication of St. Joseph Catholic Academy.

But they must always remain the source of inspiration in the years ahead.

As the title of our school says, this is a Catholic academy in the best sense of the word.

It has been widely published that St. Joseph Catholic Academy's core values are Faith, Scholarship, Leadership, Service.

- The faith that is taught and learned and lived here is the Catholic faith; it is the first and most important of the core values.
- The Catholic faith is entirely compatible with the scholarship that is present in the academic mission of St. Joseph Catholic Academy; because the Catholic faith is all about the truth that God has made known to us;
 - the truth about the world,
 - the truth about who we are as individuals,
 - the truth about who we are in relation to others,
 - and the truth about who we are in relation to God.
- Leadership is already starting to take shape here at St. Joseph Catholic Academy.
 - It is the kind of leadership in which one excels by making himself or herself more important than others. I
 - t is the kind of leadership that is inspired by the Holy Spirit who leads us in the light of the Gospel to be people who follow the leadership of Jesus Christ.
- Service at St. Joseph Catholic Academy will certainly involve
 - outreach to the poor and needy of the area since this a part of the Gospel mandate referred to by St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians
 - students caring for students in a spirit of respect, love and forgiveness
 - teachers and administrators care for the parents of our students by partnering with them to provide the best that a Catholic education can provide for their daughters and sons
 - what we are doing at this very moment: giving thanks and praise to God for everything that is already good about St.

Joseph Catholic Academy and everything that will be good as it continues to grow into the future.

I mentioned in the beginning that it may seem premature for us to be thinking about an alumni gathering for St. Joseph Catholic Academy graduates. Perhaps it is a bit premature, but it is certainly worthy of our attention.

I look forward to the first graduation from St. Joseph Catholic Academy. Once that happens, it won't be long before our alumni start to return here to remember, to celebrate, and to support their alma mater and everything that it stands for.

The lay people that founded the academy in New England that I mentioned earlier were guided by a vision that resulted in that institution being founded as a non-sectarian school. It became just another secular, private educational institution.

The lay people of this area who first approached Bishop Joseph with the vision of a Catholic high school in Centre County, did not want just another secular, private school. Most of them had attended and graduated from Catholic high schools and they wanted that experience made available for young people in this area.

The core values of St. Joseph Catholic Academy are Faith, Scholarship, Leadership, and Service and they are to remain the core values. And if they remain, we will rely on the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide all of us to work together so that St. Joseph Catholic Academy will flourish in the years ahead.

The Mass that we are celebrating and the blessing that we ask of God in the dedication of this school are reminders that we are not alone in our respective roles as

- Students and parents
- Teachers, administration, and support staff
- Board of Trustees
- Financial and spiritual benefactors.

What we are celebrating here is a new beginning and a bright future. As Sirach reminds us in the 1st reading, it is good for us to gather here in prayer

to praise and bless and thank God who does wonders and who fashions all growth from the beginning according to his will.

It may be premature for us to be thinking about alumni gatherings. However, I am optimistic about the future.

We need to acquire and retain the faith filled optimism expressed by Sirach who looked to the future in proclaiming

- the goodness and greatness of God and
- the covenant of God with his people

which will last forever and never be abrogated.

In the meantime, it is good that today we bless and dedicate this school to the glory of God as we continue to seek his blessing on us and upon this place as he promises through his Holy Spirit.

May St. Joseph, the patron saint of our school, who watched over Mary and Jesus with a father's care, intercede for us and safeguard all that we do at St. Joseph Catholic Academy.