

Given the part of Medicine Hat in which my family lived when I was born, at the time I started school, I was only able to be bussed to the public system. I completed kindergarten and grades 1 & 2 in a public school, therefore. All the while, my family was still actively practicing our faith at home and I was even prepared for my first Holy Communion exclusively by mom and dad and through the parish sacramental preparation program. Imagine my surprise on the Saturday retreat at the parish when I met a ton of kids who were also to receive their first Holy Communion, only one of whom was a classmate of mine. Naturally, I wondered, "Where do all these kids go to school?" I had lots of fun that day with many new friends whom I was sad I would never see again because they went to "Catholic school."

I complained about this to my parents. If we were Catholics, why in the world didn't they send me to Catholic school? This afforded them a brilliant opportunity to inform me that our family would be moving to a new house in a few months and that in September, I would be going to a new school named after Mother Teresa- a *Catholic School*.

My first few weeks there were nerve racking but also exciting. I was amazed how there were crucifixes everywhere, pictures of Holy Mary and how we prayed all throughout the day. My biggest and most delightful surprise, though, was discovered in the library. I stumbled upon a whole row of books all of

which were about the lives of the saints. My grandparents told us many stories about these characters and now I had found a whole book of them! I can still vividly recall the ten volume set of picture books which introduced me to our friends in heaven.

I begin by recounting this childhood experience because of the convergence of two important occasions today in the life of both the universal and our local Church. First, today we celebrate with great joy the Solemnity of All Saints. Each year the Church gives us this day to give thanks to God for all of our sisters and brothers in Christ who have preceded us into heaven. The hope of this day is the reminder that it is not only the canonized few who await us at the eternal banquet, but every just soul who has been received into the embrace of our Merciful Father. If you are in heaven, you're a saint- canonized or not.

Secondly, being that today also happens to be the first Sunday of November, in our diocese we mark Catholic Education Sunday. We use this opportunity each year to give thanks to God for the grace of preserving and promoting our Catholic separate school system, as well as to ask for the generous support of all parishioners in extending financial assistance to the foundations which supply much needed funding to provincial Catholic Education.

Nothing is a coincidence in the providential design of God and so we should give thanks today for the reminder that our celebration of all the saints of

heaven and Catholic Education must be closely related; inseparably related, in fact. No one becomes a saint without religious instruction and exposure to the faith. Catholic Education is what it is precisely because it should have as its only goal the raising up of saints for the Church. This is actually the distinguishing feature of our Catholic educational institutions. If the rearing of future saints is not our priority, then Catholic education is no different than public.

What always amazes me as a priest when I enter one of our schools is that, if we did not have publicly funded Catholic education, I would not be visiting five K-9 schools with 4,000 students; I would be lucky to be visiting one k-12 school with several hundred. There's no room for people like me in public school classrooms because there's no room for faith there either. This is reason enough for us to actively strive to defend publicly funded Catholic education as well as to promote its flourishing.

All of this does pose, however, a challenge- a significant challenge- to our Catholic school system. It's a challenge that can be posed in the form of a question: *Are our schools truly Catholic or are they Catholic in name only?* I would maintain that the litmus test to arrive at an answer to this question lies in the aforementioned focus of this day: sainthood. Are our schools making saints of students, staff and administrators alike?

It is indisputable that the times we face are times of crisis. A modern day saint who lived in many of your lifetimes, St. Josemaría Escrivá, once wrote, “A secret, an open secret: these world crises are crises of saints” (*The Way* #301). Saints are like wildfire who spread their living flames among all who surround them. Consider the now famous Winter Olympics city of Turin in the late 19th century. Long before the city was filled with Olympians, it was filled with saints!

First there was the priest, Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo who founded an apostolate to care for the poor. His work inspired the efforts of the priest Giovanni Bosco who worked alongside Sister Maria Domenica Mazzarello to establish schools for wayward and orphaned children. This was all overseen by Father Bosco’s spiritual director, Father Giuseppe Cafasso. Father Leonardo Murialdo, inspired by Father Bosco’s efforts, began Catholic movements to help labourers. Within fifty years of all of these people’s deaths, who all lived in the same city and worked together, they were canonized as saints. One of Father Bosco’s students, Domenico Savio, who died at age 14 would also go on to become a saint. One year after the death of Father Murialdo, another young man was born in Turin who would carry on their social justice legacy and himself be beatified in the 90’s, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. Seven saints, in one generation, in one city; as I was saying, holiness spreads like wildfire.

The only solution to the crises of our times is a superabundance of holiness and virtue. Today we have placed before us two very complementary paths by which that can come about: sainthood & Catholic education. Please, be generous in supporting our Catholic school system, for it is an avenue by which holiness can be taught *and caught* six hours a day, ten months a year, for 13 years. And to all here present involved in Catholic education, be true to your mission! You have one objective and one objective only: raise up saints for the Church and world, starting with yourselves! We implore the intercession of all those holy souls whom we honour today that we will each respond to the call of holiness; the vocation of us all.