

“You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Within hours of a federal election in our country, I would be most interested to receive the reactions of the various party leaders to a statement such as this one of our Lord. In the campaigns leading up to October 19th, I have heard little about the need to become “the slave of all”. On the contrary, there is much banter about how strong each one will be over the other and how poorly each one’s competition is destined to perform. There are, however, two very different definitions of power and leadership placed before us today.

I do not intend to make this homily about the election. As important as our civic duty of engaging public and political life is as Christians, we have greater matters to consider in the context of our worship. In light of these readings, we need to examine two themes which may not seem immediately related to each other. They are: leadership and servitude. These are of importance to us all, but uniquely to you as Catholic educators.

Teachers are required to be leaders, whether they feel especially endowed with that gift or not. There are a variety of ways that leadership is exercised every day in every school, whether simply in the classroom; in a school assembly;

making contributions in staff meetings; or keeping peace in the school yard, just to name a few. These are all manifestations of leadership.

As any teacher can attest to, there are two distinct ways in which leadership can be exercised: in a way which embodies domination or in a way which embodies servitude. It is automatically obvious to us which one sounds like the “right one”, the virtuous one. However, we have that reaction in large part because of the influence of our Catholic faith and not because it necessarily seems immediately obvious to us. Frequently, we are led to believe that we won’t be taken seriously as leaders unless we assert ourselves from the outset and command respect. Conversely, a leader who would first define him or herself a “slave”, as our Lord is wont to say, isn’t likely to be taken too seriously as a strong candidate for leadership. This leaves us in a bit of a conundrum.

What are we to do? How do we reconcile leadership with servitude? May I propose that, instead of being a shift in method, it actually involves a shift in disposition? Strong leadership does necessitate our assertiveness but it simultaneously demands our willingness to serve- *not to be served*. This was our Lord’s whole point: that He came not to be served but to serve. Therefore, the shift in disposition is to regard leadership not as a path to privilege or recognition, but rather, as a way to serve.

So often we buy into a false dichotomy between leadership and servitude but it is imperative that we acknowledge the impossibility of leading without serving, and that being of service is always what leads the way. They are symbiotic. Nowhere is the danger of this dichotomy more clearly demonstrated than in the supposed contradiction between faith and reason; religion and science; Catholicism and education. Given your roles as Catholic educators and administrators, if we do not strive to resolve this apparent conflict, we will render the very effort of Catholic education sterile; and if that happens, your leadership will certainly be compromised and you will simultaneously restrict how you have been called by God to be of service.

What Catholicism and education both have in common is the pursuit of truth. Catholicism reminds education that *there is A Truth* to be pursued and education reminds Catholicism that Truth is never instantly grasped but is a process of discovery and learning. Catholicism and education are at each other's service and each leads where the other is more inclined to follow.

Forgive me for hearkening to a favored movie of my past, the Jack Black film, *Nacho Libre*. In advance of a wrestling match against someone who claims to be in allegiance with Satan himself, Nacho is very concerned about his ringside partner who has no faith. He declares point blank, "I'm a little concerned about your salvation and stuff. How come you have not been baptized?", to

which his partner, Esqueleto, defensively responds, “Because I never got around to it, OKAY? I don’t know why you always have to be judging me because I only believe in science...” And so goes the second great dichotomy.

What religion and science both have in common is that they appeal to a set of laws and standards in order to arrive at their conclusions. As strange as it sounds to our post-enlightenment minds, religion and science are actually both doing the same thing! Conveniently, they have as the object of their study two different but complementary ends. Religion tries to solve the ever elusive questions of *why and who* while science seeks to know *what and when*. A modern heresy of our day is to define difference as contradiction or inequality, but blue is not the opposite of purple nor is 3 the opposite of 6; they’re just different. Religion and science can be at each other’s service and lead in the questions which the other is not asking.

Finally: faith and reason. These are claimed to be historic enemies, but why? What they both share in common is that they are equally operations of the mind; albeit, one of the will and the other of the intellect. But those two operations are not in contradiction with each other. God has masterfully woven them together in order that their cooperative functioning makes us as human beings uniquely what we are. Without intellect we would be common beasts; without wills we would be robots. The only time will and intellect- faith and reason- stand

in contradiction of each other is when we live in a state of mortal sin, where we know what is right but freely choose the opposite anyway.

Therefore, if faith and reason are two sides of the same coin, as it were, why are we inclined to pit them against each other? I suspect it is because we fear that one will inevitably overtake the other, rendering one or the other useless. This leaves us with rationalism, which would rather be right about 'what' and 'when' than take a risk asking 'why' and 'who'. On the other hand, we have fundamentalism which is convinced that 'why' and 'who' are so important that 'what' and 'when' are inconsequential. In the end, though, only half-truths remain.

In each of these false dichotomies, whether Catholicism versus education; religion versus science; or faith versus reason, the fact is ignored that these can actually be in service of each other whereby each becomes a leader in its own proper way. Herein is found the importance of establishing the complementarity between leadership and service.

That you must be leaders in your schools and classrooms is an indisputable fact. That you must do so by way of being humble servants is key. The beauty of these is that they are not in contradiction of each other just as the previous three pairs we considered are also not contradictory. If you want to be good educators who promote science and reason in your classrooms, then show your students how these things are at the service of our practice of the Catholic

faith. If you want to be exemplary models of Catholicism for your students, demonstrate for them the reasonability which serves all that we believe.

But if you fear that an honest approach to science and reason will eclipse your students' faith; or, you fear that promotion of certain tenets of the Catholic faith will seem irrational or too unpopular, then have the humility to ask the necessary questions which can resolve the conflict. I cannot guarantee that the conflict *will* be resolved in your heart and conscience, but I can guarantee *that* the conflict is resolvable. The Church asks us to believe nothing that is unreasonable and human rationality offers no contrary evidence to our faith. Be faithful servants of *THE Truth*, our Lord Jesus Christ, by letting faith and reason lead each other in your classrooms in the way that each serves best.