

Catholic Education—a Guardian

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19

Psalm 71

1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Luke 4:21-30

Today marks the beginning of Catholic Schools Week, a weeklong celebration of the gift of Catholic education for our parish and our community. Catholic education comes to us in many forms including Catholic schools and Parish Religious Education (PRE), but since this week is Catholic Schools Week, I am going to focus on how Catholic education in parochial schools is a blessing. One of the things that we celebrate about Catholic schooling is its *guardianship*. Catholic schools serve as guardians of numerous important things, including—faith, morals, and physical wellbeing.

Historically, the very first thing that Catholic schools guarded and protected in the United States was faith. Catholic schools in the U.S. were born out of cultural animosity. There was a noticeable hatred toward certain ethnic groups and toward Catholics in general in the majority of public schools in our country for many years. The Catholic Church's response to this religious and ethnic prejudice was to create its own system of education. Father Joseph McShane, S.J., in his speech at the National Catholic Education Association Convention this year, explained that—

Our immigrant ancestors were deeply aware of the prejudices that the culture had against them. They were equally aware of the fact that the culture wanted them to drop those things that marked them as foreigners so that they could assimilate fully into American society. (For our ancestors, complete assimilation then meant that they would have to give up both their faith and the languages that they brought with them to America.) The bishops of the 19th century were deeply aware of the pressure that the immigrant members of the church felt. Therefore, they sought to insulate them from the pressures of American society in significant ways. One of the most audacious strategies for protecting their people from the hostility of American culture was the creation of the Catholic school system.¹

There is still a significant ethnic and religious prejudice towards Catholics in many parts of the United States today. In the midst of this animosity, Catholic schools continue to guard the faith of our children, giving them daily opportunities to celebrate the tradition, diversity and beauty of our faith.

Catholic schools also help to guard and pass on Christian morals. It used to be that a child's family and society provided him or her with a moral compass. That is no longer always the case. Many parents struggle to find the time and circumstances to share the morals that they received from their parents. They feel overwhelmed by the fact that our society no longer helps them communicate good morals to their children. Instead, our society is saturated in relativism—a belief that truth and morals are relative (i.e. different for each person), rather than absolute. Catholic education continues to teach students that there is such a thing as Truth with a capital “T,” and morals are not defined by each individual, but rather, by God.

¹ http://www.ncea.org/news/pressrelease/article.asp?article_id=277

Catholic schools also guard the physical wellbeing of children. At my first parish assignment, I polled several hundred Catholic school kids and asked them what they loved best about Catholic education. I expected the top answer to be something like, “We learn about our faith,” or “We get to stay home on Feast days.” However, the students’ #1 answer was, “I feel safe.” Wow! This really surprised me. I had never thought about the worry and fear that many kids feel about going to school. But, in a culture where there are frequent horrific acts of violence at schools, including shootings, rapes, and teachers being accosted, Catholic school students are grateful for simply being safe.

Catholic schools are the guardian for so many important things. I’ve only mentioned a few of them here, but I hope that this week, we can celebrate the many ways that Catholic schools protect the things that are most important in our lives. Last, but not least, I want to thank the many families in our parish who make considerable sacrifices in order to send their children to our schools, as well as the many parishioners who make sacrifices in order to continue the ministry of Catholic Schools and education in our parish!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ How has Catholic education—whether through Catholic schools, PRE, RCIA, adult education, Bible studies, etc.—served as a “guardian” in your life?