



Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland
Bishop Emeritus
Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Founders' Day Mass
Kansas City, Missouri
Notre Dame de Sion
January 19, 2007

Think of all history as a vast mural or tapestry of brilliant colors. A founder is one whose vision and work inserts another color into that panorama of shades and hues and it trails out like the tail of a comet as the founder's followers enrich civilization generation by generation.

Such was the spiritual impact of the two Ratisbonne brothers, who founded the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion (Notre Dame de Sion) which in turn founded this school which you have inherited.

The Ratisbannes belonged to one of the most influential Jewish families in Alsace in NE France. The second son, Theodore was born in Strasbourg in 1802. He was well educated and he read himself into the Catholic Church by his serious study of Scripture and Ecclesiastical history. To the consternation of his family and because of their strenuous opposition at the age of 25 he sought and was secretly baptized as a Catholic, taking the name Marie as a baptismal name. Three years later he was ordained a priest and, estranged from his family, he left Strasbourg for Paris. No one demonstrated more bitterness towards his new way of life than his brother, Alphonse, twelve years his junior, and the ninth child of the Ratisbonne family. Then God intervened in a most extraordinary way. Alphonse, now a successful lawyer and banker and still at odds with Theodore, embarked on a tour of Europe, something which was very popular among the aristocracy and wealthy classes of the continent. Rome, not because of the Catholic Church, but because of its history and antiquities was always someplace to see and to savor. For some unknown reason Alphonse entered the famous Church of St. Andrea della Fratte, a short distance from the Tiber. There he underwent an extraordinary spiritual experience akin to what happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. It involved the Blessed Mother – some say it was a vision but it changed his life both instantaneously and so radically that eleven days later he asked for baptism, and, like his elder brother, he too took the name of Marie. Six years later he was ordained a priest and, after a few years as a Jesuit, he joined his brother in Paris where, no doubt influenced by their personal family experiences, they dedicated the rest of their lives to the promotion of understanding between Christians and Jews. Two Congregations, one of men and one of women, each with differing and multi-faceted apostolates, spread to all five continents. Early on they realized that education, rather than proselytism, was the better way to promote their goals. This school, in so many ways your school, is a living monument to their vision and for all that was, and is, and is yet to be we should be grateful to the two brothers of the mid 19th century who, like Christ and his mother and most of his apostles, were Jewish who saw in Christianity the fulfillment of the Hebrew scriptures. That link still remains, in our Mass as usually our readings come from what we call the Old Testament and the New Testament. Maybe Pope Pius XII put it succinctly when he declared, "spiritually we are all Semites." The Ratisbonne brothers were truly bridge builders and we honor them best by continuing their work to forge links of understanding not only between Jews and Christians but in our world view of these latter days when we need to extend

our search for understanding with those we know as Muslims.

An understanding heart – notice I do not say mind – should be one of the great products of a comprehensive education, one you are privileged to receive within these walls. Do you really realize how fortunate you are?

Maybe because I grew up in Europe I sometimes believe that despite the vastness, variety and ethnic diversity of this great country of ours, we can come across to others as narrow-minded and even arrogant. I visited eight countries in Europe this past October and in all of them I discovered much negative criticism of the United States and Americans generally. Part of this is generated by the fact that we are the only superpower, at least for the present, remaining in the world..... and the leader always gets most, deserved or undeserved, of the blame when things go wrong. There may be more to it. We need to realize that the world is more than Kansas City, be it in Missouri or Kansas. As the age of electronic communications shrinks our world we must become aware that what happens in Khartoum or Kampala today will have some impact on Kansas City tomorrow.

Let me share with you a statistical pen picture of the world in miniature which has enormous implications for the nation you will inherit as adults. This is just a matter of a few years away, even for those of you who are currently freshmen. I am indebted to "The Economist" of London for the statistics I am about to share with you.

If today's world could be reduced to a representative 100 people, here is what it would look like.

50 would be men and 50 would be women – there's no mystery to this. Of our imaginative 100, 61 would be Asians, 12 Europeans, 13 Africans, 14 would be Americans, but this includes all of North, Central and South America.

In the sphere of religion, 33 would be Christian, i.e. Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox, 18 Muslim, 16 Hindu, 6 Buddhist, 16 would be classified as non-religious and 11 as practicing other religions. This latter number includes the Jews who only constitute a very tiny percentage of the world's population.

How do we live?

Of our 100, 41 live without basic sanitation. 16 live without clean water. 14 can't read, 13 are hungry or malnourished, and 6 people of our sample own 59% of the wealth of the entire community.

Of our tiny world of just 100 people, keeping the current percentages as they exist in reality, only 7 have a high school education, only 8 have a computer and only 4 have an internet connection.

Let me ask you four questions. Do you have a roof over your head? Do you have a bed to sleep in? Do you keep your food in a refrigerator? Do you keep your clothes in a closet? If you have given a positive answer to all four questions, then you are richer than 75% of the population.

We must remember that in our world today, 47% struggle to live on \$2.00 per day or less. That

is about \$730.00 per year. How would you manage on that meager income?

You are blessed. You are privileged.

Scripture reminds us, "To whom much is given, from them much is expected." You must provide leadership. You can show your gratitude by service and that service should be worthy of the spirit of your school.

I have one final challenge to offer you this morning. My generation is currently in its 70's, you constitute part of our teenage generation. In between there are two other generations which provide places for your parents and grandparents. Your mothers and grandmothers have been the pioneers in the quest for equality for women in the marketplace and elsewhere. They were the ones who broke through the so-called glass ceiling. For many of them they did so at great personal cost and sometimes mistakes were made. By your observations you can learn a great deal from them as you continue their quest. It is especially not easy for a woman to balance her domestic life with her professional obligations. Yet this is what you must learn to do. There are some who "want it all," but "having it all" is not always possible. Remember that there is no use winning the battle if you lose the war. I'm sure that many of you are very familiar with the Jesuit Rockhurst High School which is just a short distance away from here. Their great patron is St. Ignatius of Loyola who changed his own life and many others for the better by realizing the truth of the scripture admonition, "What does it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"