



**Most Reverend Robert W. Finn**  
**Bishop**  
**Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph**

School Year Opening Mass of the Holy Spirit  
St. Therese Parish, Parkville, Missouri  
Homily  
August 17, 2009

Dear Pastors,  
Dear Administrators and Teachers,  
Friends in Christ all,

In my time as Diocesan Bishop so far, I have sealed thousands of our young people with the Gift of the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Confirmation is a special part of my work as bishop. In about 55 to 60 such events per year, I enjoy meeting these budding men and women – all dressed up, often fidgety, particularly in the first half of the Mass waiting for the Sacrament to be bestowed. Afterward they are more at ease while we get together for photos or cookies and punch. I realize after spending 13 years in full time high school work, I have the privilege of spending moments with them when they are at their best, and then I get to walk away and leave them to you and their parents!

This morning I have a different joy – to meet with you and ask the grace of the Holy Spirit upon you and your efforts. You men and women exercise an extraordinary, dignified, holy, **and challenging** work in the Church – the education and formation of our young people. I count you among my most valued co-workers. In turn, you and I, and your pastors, take our place at the service of the parents, whose love for their sons and daughters urges them to seek our expert help and dedication in the forming of precious bodies, minds, and souls. We all know – parents, pastors, and teachers alike – that these students are, after all, the sons and daughters of the Eternal Father, created in His Image, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and destined for eternal salvation. Nothing is as important – nothing – but that we see them live good and full lives, learn the truth deeply and with integrity, grow in holiness, and get to heaven.

The Second Vatican Council in its ***Declaration on Christian Education, Gravis-simum Educationis***, summarized the mission of Catholic education this way: [The work of Catholic Education] “is directed toward ensuring that the Baptized are gradually introduced to

the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, and that they become daily more appreciative of the gift of faith they have received; that they may learn to adore God the Father in Spirit and in truth – especially through the liturgy; that they may be trained to live their lives in the new self – justified and sanctified in truth – so as to attain their full stature in authentic manhood – completed in Christ, and make their contribution to the growth of the mystical Body of Christ.” (G.E. #2.)

Today, I am here to encourage you, but also, to call down upon you the same Holy Spirit who ignited apostolic hearts at Pentecost and sacramentally seals the confirmed, so that we can become more and more God’s instruments for this work. It is the work of the Church, and I call you to fulfill it well with God’s help.

The past year we have undertaken a comprehensive planning study for all our diocesan schools. Though the initial recommendations have been made, I have asked even more people – clergy and lay, teachers and parents, persons with much expertise in many fields - to look to all the practical implications of the plan. That work is not yet complete. We want a living and livable Plan and we won’t be satisfied until we have one. Why? Because, as the Council stressed a generation ago, and as the Church has restated so many times before and since, the apostolate of the Catholic schools must continue.

Paragraph #5: ***“Among the various organs of education the school is of outstanding importance ...”***

Paragraph #8: ***“The Church’s role is especially evident in Catholic schools.”***

Later in the same section: ***“It is the special function of Catholic schools to develop an atmosphere animated by liberty and charity based on the Gospel. It orients [the students] to the message of salvation ... illumined by faith.”***

And in yet another place: ***“Accordingly the Catholic school ... is still of vital importance. The Sacred Synod affirms again the right of the Church to establish such schools – a right reasserted again and again in many documents of the Magisterium.”***

We are working to assure the stability and strength of our schools. We know that – as necessary as they are – they won’t succeed on their own. We have to engage our insight and devotion to assure their effectiveness and keep the authentic mission in focus.

Great emphasis was rightly given by the Council to the role of parents as the first and most important teachers of their children in the life of faith. Paragraph #3 of the Council's Declaration on Education, says that because they are the principal educators, ***"It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow man. It is in the Christian family. . .that children should be taught to know and worship God and to love their neighbor."***

This right and responsibility is proclaimed at the baptism of the child, when the mother and father, assisted and supported by the Godparents, make the Profession of Faith for the child and promise solemnly to bring up their son or daughter in the practice of the faith. Prayer and worship are vital elements of this formation, and Covenant agreements for Sunday Mass attendance have been applied meaningfully in several of our schools for many years. The obligation to attend Sunday Mass has always been taught by the Church and promoted in our Catholic schools. Now, with the determination of pastors, teachers and parents to do even more to deepen the pledge of the Catholic identity in our schools, we pray that the inspiration of this common sign, Covenant Agreements in all our Diocesan Schools, will renew our solidarity with each other, be a reassurance to our children, and help us all grow closer to God through a vibrant participation in the core weekly event of parish life.

We gather here this morning, dear teachers, in part, because parents look to us – and to the apostolate of the Catholic School – for help in forming children: in every field of study; in the promotion of human culture; and in the continuity of the life of faith. The Council speaks about this crucial task.

***"Splendid, therefore, and of highest importance is the vocation of those who help parents in carrying out their duties for Christian education."***

In another place, ***"Teachers must remember that it depends chiefly on them whether the Catholic School achieves its purpose."***

***"The Sacred Synod declares that the service of teachers constitutes an active apostolate - one that is indeed very necessary."*** (G.E. ## 3, 8, 9)

It is clear to me through my observation of our schools, and from the Church's own

teaching, that your sacrifices with and for students and their families are so much more than a “job.” You make this clear by your dedication. Yours is a holy vocation within society and within the Church. You spend more active hours with these children than some of them have with their parents. You are forming them in supernatural faith, hope, and charity, and helping them live these values in their life. This doesn’t happen only in religion class. It is conscious and explicit in every educational exercise: math, science literature. The daily announcements and the way we do extra-curriculars must show our Catholic culture. Our schools are free to pray aloud, and the sacred signs that adorn our walls, and the songs we sing are alive with symbols of our faith. When we discipline we do it with and out of a conviction that we live in mutual respect because of Jesus Christ. We look for opportunities to share our faith and go out in apostolic service in the name of the Lord. This is the meaning of the Catholic School.

As the Council acknowledged we need and depend on the entire Church for the success of our Catholic Schools. **“The Sacred Synod earnestly exhorts the pastors of the Church and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools to become increasingly effective – especially in caring for the poor.”** (G.E. #9)

Our determination to see our Catholic Schools continue and flourish in every dimension of their mission, is undiminished, despite the formidable challenges we face. I am extremely grateful for the sacrifices you all make: as teachers and school administrators. I am thankful to our Diocesan School Office leaders, diocesan and local School Board members, our pastors, parents and families of our students – and some of our students themselves work to pay their tuition - and all the faithful in our parishes and many others in our community, who help us secure the future of our schools.

In the next few moments I will be inviting all of you, our teachers and administrators in our Catholic Schools, to stand with me to renew our Baptismal pledges as we have often done at Easter. We will proclaim our Christian Commitment as trusted participants in the apostolate of forming young people. I will ask the seal and grace of the Holy Spirit to help us in this effort.

Let us turn to Mary and Joseph, who were entrusted with the care and human formation of the child Jesus in the home and “school” at Nazareth, to assist us with their prayers.