



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

Mass for Catholic Home School Families
August 28, 2005



My Dear Friends in Christ,

Visiting with some bright young students recently, these various aged children began to assure me that they were the top students in their respective classes – each of them. Furthermore they each claimed they were the teacher’s favorite student in the class.

Eventually they admitted to me that they were also the biggest problem students in their classes and they had gotten in trouble more than anyone else in their grade, ... that in their school they were the most improved student at their grade level, and they could sing better, run the fastest, ... you get the picture.

These were home-schoolers – one per class - and their teacher-Mom could only agree with their claims.

I have been blessed in the last weeks to celebrate Holy Mass for groups of teachers and principals. Yesterday I celebrated the Mass of the Holy Spirit to mark the beginning of the school year in one of our Catholic High Schools.

Today’s Mass is very special, too. And I want to thank you for inviting me to offer Holy Mass for you members of the Catholic Home School community in the Diocese.

Today’s memorial, St. Augustine , and yesterday’s of his mother St. Monica provide us a fitting occasion to reflect on the mission of Catholic education and the family.

St. Augustine was well educated in the schools of his day. But they were pagan schools in a pagan culture and despite the presence of his saintly mother, Augustine readily became absorbed into the world around him.

St. Monica, his mother, never gave up on him and never ceased praying and sacrificing for his conversion. It happened eventually, but only after much destruction and hurt.

St. Augustine lamented his years of searching for satisfaction in his life in things that could not make him happy. He regretted that he had found God so late. “Late have I loved you,” he writes, “O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you.”

God had entrusted him with very significant talents, but he had not only failed to invest them

and multiply them. He hadn't even kept them safely buried like the disappointing servant in today's Gospel. Rather, St. Augustine just spent what God gave him selfishly on personal pleasure, and – for this – was left empty and full of longing.

His conversion was aided by the prayers of his mother and the teaching of St. Ambrose, the 4th century bishop of Milan . His conversion was a supernatural event of God's grace breaking through the blindness and the deafness the deceptions of the world had caused. St. Augustine , whom the Church refers to as the "Doctor of Grace" says to God, "You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness."

St. Augustine 's story is one that illustrates powerfully the effect the culture – good or evil - will have on our formation as persons. What we experience in our public schools, in private schools, in our Catholic schools – What happens in the school at home will have its impact on the kind of persons we become.

As I have stressed to the leadership of our Catholic schools I also affirm for all our benefit today. We must provide our students academic excellence, and we must hand on to them authentic Catholic faith.

The great challenge of Catholic education is not only to teach and learn the basics of our faith, faithfully and well - and this has not always been done – but the next step is also a great challenge:

We must awaken within our students the gift of living faith in the midst of all their learning. This means of course, that anyone who would be a proper teacher must cultivate the life of faith in their own heart as well. We must embrace every encounter of teaching and learning as an invitation to encounter the ONE who has revealed HIMSELF as TRUTH - JESUS CHRIST.

There is no truth that is in contradiction to Him. AGAIN – there cannot exist any scientific truth, or "so-called secular truth," – no set of valid moral truths apart from Jesus Christ.

Catholic schools and home schools must both teach good religion – that's clear! But we somehow have to determine how to teach Catholic math, Catholic computer. For the sake of God who made our wonderful bodies and put us together with each other, we can learn and play sports with a Catholic dimension. Everything must be somehow infused with a strong dose of supernatural faith, hope, and love. Quite a challenge!

But, IF WE INVITE HIM TO DO SO, Jesus Christ the Divine teacher accompanies us — and He makes possible what we could not do on our own.

I think it is true that some families begin to home school because they are concerned that these Catholic truths and values are not being well transmitted. As a priest who has always lived in Catholic parishes with schools, and taught and worked as a Catholic high school administrator, I have always worried about this too – that our schools are not doing all they can – all they must do. Many principals and teachers work hard to make their schools faithful to our Catholic Tradition.

But I think many of you continue in this endeavor of teaching your children for a variety of reasons that are more about the satisfaction you receive from spending so much time

learning with your children, being their parent and their teacher – growing closer as a family.

This privilege of teaching and learning in the “**school of the home**” is something for which you should always give thanks to God. Students and parents should both be thankful for the opportunity it affords.

More than the scenes I can remember from my years in school, I remember and can picture rather clearly certain memories of after-school learning.

From before I ever went to school I remember my mother at my bedside teaching me the Hail Mary, and my other prayers. In March of this year – a few months after my mom’s death we sold the family home. The day before I signed the papers and handed over the keys, I went to my old bedroom and prayed that prayer once more in – as close as I could recall – the place she taught it to me.

I also remember her and my older sister drilling my times-tables with me. I remember my Dad helping me learn my servers’ prayers – they were in Latin!

I remember helping my younger brother with his spelling words, and many other vignettes of home learning. Yes some of the clearest of my memories of learning are at home with family. This learning – I have come to appreciate many years later – had a unique dimension to it. We should never underestimate the potential of home learning to form us as persons.

And in the system and vocation of our Catholic schools we must never resent or underestimate the power of parents to guide and make substantive decisions about the education and Catholic formation of their children.

We must not, of course, give up on our Catholic schools.

I, as a pastor and bishop, but you also, as Catholic faithful of the Church, must always be willing to try to make them better. We must support efforts to give families real, economically accessible options to the schools they need for their children. The Church has called upon the state to assure this parental right to choose an appropriate education for their children.

The Church also insists that the state allow you the autonomy to choose a home-based education for your children. God Himself has made you your children’s teachers. The Church is obliged to stand by you and support you in this fundamental right and duty.

Like St. Monica, all parents have moments when they will weep and pray, and pray and weep over the mistakes their children make – no matter how loving, holy, and complete the education they have received. True love never allows us to give up on reaching the one and ultimate goal: heaven.

Our learning becomes most open to God – most likely to put us on the path to heaven - the more we realize, like St. Augustine , that this is a supernatural work taking place within the human mind and heart.

Dear families, may your faithful endeavors in the school of the home, teach you the way to the home that lasts forever.