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Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Homily—Teacher Convocation

**St. Therese Parish
Kansas City, Missouri**

August 15, 2011

Dear Pastors

Dear Teachers, Administrators, and School Staff,

Dear Friends in Christ all,

Our eyes are fixed today in this Mass on the 'Woman clothed with the sun.' This Queen, arrayed in gold, has gone before us into God's heavenly home to be a sign of hope for all mankind. She is the humble maiden 'full of grace;' she is the highest honor of our race; the most noble human person ever created, who responded to God's call and grace with complete obedience and extraordinary love.

In the mystery of God's plan she is rightly called "Theotokos" Mother of God; and at the Cross Jesus gave her to us, His beloved disciples, to be our Mother. Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope.

The image presented to us in today's first reading is of a great and cosmic struggle between good and bad. Jesus, the Child of the woman, Mary, is threatened by the destructive design of the dragon. There was no doubt that the victory and accomplishment of God would win out; that the lamb, though slain, would be victorious. But God also protects His people. He guards Mary and her children.

The Fathers of the Church, the traditions of Christian art and architecture, have shown how the heavenly images, songs, and victorious praise that we read in the Book of Revelation are not images only of our final destination, heaven. We see that truly the Church's sacred liturgy is even now an occasion for us to lift up our hearts, our minds, our whole being, toward

the heavenly banquet of which this Holy Eucharist is a foretaste and anticipation. The images of martyrs and other saints at the throne of God in heaven – a dominant part of the Book of Revelation - is a pledge of the Great Communion of saints that we enjoy, especially when we gather at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Each time we gather we are invited to look – not only toward those around us, but also together to look up. We must often remind ourselves of the high dignity of our calling and that of every human person. We must live fully in a faithful generous response to the needs of our brothers and sisters; we must be engaged in our daily work as a meaningful expression of our human calling. At the same time, we cannot afford to forget that all we do here must be ordered to the life to which we are destined; life on high for eternity with Christ. Mary's Assumption helps us recall what awaits us. In this sense "the woman clothed with the sun" is our model and 'our hope.'

The beauty of this feast comes in the midst of a long hot summer. I almost said "at the end of" the summer, but I'm not sure it is over. We stand nonetheless at the beginning of a new school year. The cycle is renewed in the arrival of our co-workers and our students. The sudden infusion of life and energy soon will be, perhaps already is, engaging us. It is good. It is our calling. It is the active resumption of the journey of life and learning and growth. Once again our students will change before our eyes: they will live, and learn and grow – and so will we. And we know that new life, meaningful learning, and real growth always means leaving something behind and starting up again. Our lives get changed by the people we have encountered and the experiences we have shared. Learning stretches our minds and hearts. Growth means something that was once comfortable doesn't quite fit any longer. At times we may be tempted to look back in regret – to say I could have and should have done better. We could be nostalgic for a time that seemed simpler. In these moments God's gift is hope. Hope helps us look forward. We trust. We trust each other to help, and we trust God knowing that He can and will and does work miracles: bringing something new and even better out of what has been: whether joyful or painful.

When I was a teacher, there was a part of me that didn't want the summer to end. But the reassurance of new life and the goodness of co-workers and students always won me over in late August. This has been a long and challenging Summer. As I said, I'm not sure it is near ending. But the promise of new life, of new learning, of new growth; the reassurance of good co-workers in the Church, causes me to have hope. For us – as followers of Jesus Christ, as co-workers and disciples who do what we do surrounded by a communion of heavenly friends,

as children of Mary our heavenly Queen – for us regret must always give way to hope. We ask for the gift and grace of hope, and we know the promises of Christ are trustworthy. We often ask Mary, “Pray for us O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.” Yes, make us worthy to have hope in Christ’s promises.

Dear friends, fellow teachers, in a moment we will renew the promises of our Baptism – the sign and efficacious cause of our life in Christ. We will Profess our Faith in those saving truths and realities, both seen and unseen. We will make again our commitment to live our own faith and practice it fully. We voice our resolve to teach and form and protect those entrusted to us – in partnership with their parents – with renewed hope. I thank you for the faith and work that you have brought and will bring to our project of Catholic education. I am thankful to the leadership of our Diocesan School Office; to our superintendents, principals, teachers, and school staff; to our pastors who provide another vital work of leadership in keeping the promise of Catholic education. Our parishioners – both our school families but also so many others who generously support our schools – deserve our constant prayers and most sincere expressions of gratitude. We thank God for our students who, by their simple love and trust and faith, remind us every day of how important and vital our work is.

May God receive our profession, help us keep our promises, and strengthen our hope. May He preserve and prosper this vital part of the mission of the Church.

Today at the side of Christ’s throne, and at the pinnacle of the Communion of Saints is Mary, assumed into heaven, radiant queen, Mother of God and our Mother. Mary “our hope,” keep us always on a safe path to Jesus.