

HOLY AND HEROIC TEACHERS **In the Year of the Laity**

*Tribute to Teachers during World Teachers' Day
October 5, 2014*

Dear People of God:

If you wish, you can be taught; if you are willing to listen, you will learn; if you give heed, you will be wise. Frequent the company of the elders; whoever is wise, stay close to him. Be eager to hear every godly discourse; let no wise saying escape you. If you see a man of prudence, seek him out; let your feet wear away his doorstep! Reflect on the precepts of the LORD, let his commandments be your constant meditation; then he will enlighten your mind, and the wisdom you desire he will grant. (Sirach 6:32-37)

Parents as first teachers

Parents are the primary teachers of faith and morals. *“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule.”* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2223)

And when they had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him. (Luke 2:39-40)

Education in the faith by the parents should begin in the child's earliest years... Parents have the mission of teaching their children to pray and to discover their vocation as children of God (CCC, 2226). Jesus grew up in the city of Nazareth where there was no formal schooling, Nazareth became his first school with Mary and Joseph his first teachers. Even without formal schooling, just from the lives of witnessing by his parents, Jesus was filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. After all, children learn from what they see.

We do know that the education of a child does not end in the home. It has always been said that it takes a village to raise a child. Thus, the parents must exercise their right to choose a school for their children that will best help them in their task as Christian educators (CCC, 2229).

Teachers as formators of character and competence

Children grow in faith and wisdom when nurtured by proper education. Proper education as a supplement for the formation in the home must be given well in the schools. This includes having the best possible teachers. *“The nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ, they reveal the Christian message not only by word, but also by every gesture of their behaviour.”* (The Catholic School, 43) These teachers educate not only the mind but also the heart.

Teachers are shapers of competence and character. They never deliver mediocrity, only excellence. They come to class prepared and on time. In so doing, they model for the students what is expected from each of them. Thus, pushing their students to become responsible and helping them develop their full potentials.

Teachers draw out what is best in students. They are patient in dealing with those who are discipline-challenged and as well as the academically-challenged. They try to find the unique giftedness in each person, drawing out the Christ in them.

Moreover, as formators of competence and character they are witnesses of faith. They take learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. Teachers open the eyes of the students to the realities and problems of the world. They show how each we are connected with nature and with one another. *“If one part is hurt, all the parts share its pain. And if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy”* (1 Corinthians 12:26). Teachers then encourage each student to contemplate on how she or he can contribute to the betterment of the world. When they teach, they *“bring the experience of their own lives to this social development and social awareness, so that students can be prepared to take their place in society ...”* (LCIS, 19)

We owe much to teachers. They mold and inspire the young to work for social transformation. The current situation that we have in our country, however, presents a rather bleak condition for those engaged in the teaching profession.

Plight of teachers

Time and again we would hear stories of teachers going abroad for better pay as caregivers or domestic helpers. We have private school teachers migrating to public schools for higher pay because some private school salaries are so low cannot even afford raise a family. Yet even the public school system with a relatively higher salary scale has its share of

challenges for teachers. There is the challenge of multi-grade teaching especially in schools located in the hinterlands. Teachers are faced with the difficulty of managing their time handling two classes inside the same classroom divided only by a blackboard to allow the teacher to monitor activities happening on the other side of the room. The tedious task of preparing lessons and the additional task of checking for two grade levels would be very taxing for these teachers. Sometimes, those hired to do multi-grade teaching are even new graduates without any teaching experience and yet, they persevere in with their work. There are also principals who even use part of their salaries just to improve the conditions of the schools under their care – true stewards in the service of the providing education for the nation. We have volunteer catechists who give religious instruction in the public schools without any pay at all.

There are also teachers, both in the public and private sector (those in small mission schools), who travel hours on end to scale mountains and cross rivers before they can reach the schools. Some schools do not have the proper amenities, with buildings that are ready to collapse in the next natural disaster. Some do not have electricity and therefore are not conducive to learning but the teachers continue to persevere anyway and make do with the available resources. There are those who have dedicated themselves for the education of the Indigenous People away from the cities. This would mean that they would be away from their families for days just so they could deliver education.

Teachers as heroes and saints

Teachers prepare for class, undergo ongoing training for their discipline, build community with other teachers, and continue to be formed by the church. Outside the school, they have families to raise on their own and sometimes their salaries are not enough to support their families. Even in the face of the seemingly dire situations that we find these educators in, they persist in their vocation because they believe in the cause of education, because they know that education gives hope and leads to social transformation. These educators are the true missionaries who *“fully respond to all of its demands, secure in the knowledge that their response is vital for the construction and ongoing renewal of the earthly city, and for the evangelization of the world.”* (LCIS, 37)

Teachers are challenged to be brave amidst the turbulent times. They are called to holiness and heroism. They look to the teacher par excellence, Jesus Christ. Jesus never rejected the title teacher. *“You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.”* [John 13:13]. He spoke with authority. He was a great communicator of the vision of the Kingdom.

Teachers then look to Christ as example. By their witness of the faith and through their example, they make saints and heroes out of their students. They use the discipline of love to lead them to holiness and heroism.

There is no retirement for teachers. Even as employment ends, teachers devote their time as volunteer catechists in public schools, they lead in forming the basic ecclesial communities in parishes. They take active part in their dioceses. They take part in the building of the Kingdom.

Gratitude to Teachers

For this reason, we would like to thank all those who have committed their lives in the teaching profession. We thank them for the service they deliver to our nation by their excellent teaching. They are our heroes. They are the true missionaries. They give without counting the cost. They *“develop in themselves, and cultivate in their students, a keen social awareness and a profound sense of civic and political responsibility... committed to the task of forming men and women who will make the “ civilization of love ” a reality.”* (LCIS, 19)

We also thank all those who help in one way or another in making the circumstances for our teachers a little better. We thank the Department of Education for trying to close the gap in teacher and student ratio and providing better salaries for the public school teachers. We thank all the school administrators for always looking after the interest of our teachers. We thank parish priests who encourage volunteer catechists to go to public schools and deliver religious instruction.

In as much as we feel the support of government, we ask you to go the extra mile. We call on our legislators and budget personnel to continue to support our education system.

We also call on our brother priests to strengthen catechetical instruction in the public schools within your parishes. Moreover, make your parishes youth friendly. As pastors of souls you are teachers of the faith. Visit the public schools and be present in the youth of the schools, encourage and inspire the young people to choose education as a vocation.

We admonish the young people to love and respect their teachers. They have sacrificed much of their lives to make you responsible members of

society. It is our prayer that the best ones among you will find it in your hearts to be teachers.

We appeal to the administrators of the schools to ensure that schools are places of encounter with God; that your students and teachers experience God in your campus. Continue to give your teachers support they need so they can deliver quality education to the students.

Finally, we thank the teachers for your generosity of spirit. We pray that you persevere in the good work that you are doing. Continue to let the face of God shine on you. *“May the Lord who began his good work in you will see it to completion in the day of Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 1:9).

May Mary mother of all teachers bring us closer to Jesus our only Teacher!

For the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, October 5, 2014,
World Teachers’ Day

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