

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

“Then Jesus answered her: “Woman, you have great faith! What you wanted – will be done for you.” At that moment, her daughter was cured.”
St. Matthew 15:28

The Sermon

Let me begin this morning – by stating what should be obvious – but probably isn’t – on this Lutheran Schools Sunday: Public schools are unable to deal with morality and religion. But man is not born to be a good citizen. Good citizenship is a byproduct of the Christian life.

A child belongs to God – signified by the name giving part of the Service of Holy Baptism. The training of a child – is – in the final analysis – the responsibility of the Church – which will have to give an accounting one day to God. *“Feed My lambs”* (Jn 21) was the Lord’s command – and this doesn’t only mean spiritual feeding. The whole person is involved in the feeding process – since Christian faith is a way of life – in which all things are to be done – as to the Lord.

So the Church was on the educational scene – long before the state ever dreamed of educating anyone. The line is clearly drawn then – between those who assert: *“The Lord! He is God! The Lord! He is God!”* (I Kgs) – and those who assert: “The State – **it** is God.” Let me go on by stating more things – that should be obvious – but too often aren’t:

The importance of religious training – will not justify inferior academics. Such a school should be closed down. A congregation – which will not

sacrifice enough – to provide academic excellence – should search for other – **inferior** strategies – for exercising its responsibilities toward the young.

Luther said: “God has made me and all creatures” – including the natural and cultural objects of our study – which come from God. “God has given me – my reason – and all my senses.” God is honored by their use in study and aesthetic enjoyment. From beginning to end – the Bible stresses: *“serving the Lord your God with all your mind.”* (Deut and Mt)

Education doesn’t take place in a spiritual or moral vacuum. Secular subjects are taught and studied in a distinctively Christian way – when they are approached – in the fear and love of God – in an environment of **Christian** humanism. Such an environment involves freedom and integrity – following reason and intuition – to learn and experience as much as you can about God’s Creation.

The most important feature of that context is – of course – the teacher. Good teaching is the world’s most exhausting job. Teachers – like good shoemakers – stick to their lasts – (no pun intended) – and work patiently at the infinitely complicated job – of setting young minds on a disciplined quest for – the true – the beautiful – the honest – and the lovely things – **St. Paul says** – should be the preoccupation of Christians.

There is a widespread notion in this nation that parochial school teachers – like nuns and monks – are satisfied with low salaries – supplemented with occasional gifts from individual members – like a chicken – or a bag of potatoes or an apple pie – because all they really want is an arena for their altruism. Well, I have news for you: A teacher is God’s servant – but no man’s flunky. There is no excuse for unprofessional treatment of teachers – in the arena of compensation and expectations. No excuse!

Compensation should never be based on a congregation’s assessment of a teacher’s need – but on a professionally determined scale – which takes into account – credentials and experience – and provides a budget for professional development. There is no excuse for a notoriously underpaid staff.

I know – from personal experience – the impact of teachers. George Denninger at St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran School in Cudahy, Wisconsin – rescued David Last from being a juvenile delinquent – from going on to

prison – or turning to the later drug culture of the 1960's. George Denninger taught me English – grammar – rhetoric – and composition. He gave me a daily demonstration of a wise – competent – and dedicated teacher and man of God – in action. George Denninger taught me to want something better. There was no way I was going to a public high school – once George Denninger was done with me. So I went on to a Lutheran High School – a Lutheran college – and a Lutheran Seminary.

He made me dissatisfied with what I was. And ever since – that has been one of my fixed goals: to teach those entrusted to my charge – to be dissatisfied with what they are. It is only one step then to the next goal: to make the student dissatisfied with the world – as it is.

The basic issue before us on this Lutheran Schools Sunday – is whether or not – the congregations of the Missouri Synod – like this one – will still honor the apostolic mandate – that the laborer is worthy of his hire. Jesus was called Rabbi – which means Teacher. Not only is He Friend and Savior – but He is One who teaches – and He teaches with authority. The teaching Christ is central to the Church's life.

We are a confessional church. Dogma is to theology – what axioms are to mathematics. We return to the axioms and the dogma – to re-establish our bearings. An undogmatic Lutheran is like the Flying Dutchman – a lost soul – doomed – to purposeless wanderings – with no certain destination. You will not find a sign in front of St. Martin that says: "Destination Unknown." That sign does exist outside a church – two blocks down the street.

A Christian School then – must be in the vanguard of the progress of knowledge – not behind it. In this place – we battle against ignorance – fear – famine – and other human ills. I suspect that the greatest battles of the future will be in quiet classrooms – in libraries – in laboratories – which we still need to build in this place.

These battles will revolve around the great questions which must be answered in every generation: our view of God – of the Church – of the State – of the nature of man – of the human mind and spirit – and of the nature of truth. It is our destiny – here at St. Martin – to throw ourselves into this battle – as our forefathers did.

C.S. Lewis noticed that the early Christians – out-lived – out-thought – and out-died – their pagan opponents. That should never change. Excellence – is a religious mandate. Mediocrity – is a surrender to the devil. Let St. Martin Lutheran Church and School then be: a place where high religion and high intellect – meet. May this be a place that lives under the Cross of Christ. And when Jesus looks at St. Martin – may He say: *“You have a strong faith! What you wanted – will be done for you.”* (v. 28). Amen

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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