



Giving Thanks

It's that time of year again: the days are getting shorter, the temperatures are getting cooler, the leaves are turning their majestic colours, and farms are harvesting their food and preparing their fields for the long, cold, winter. I am particularly glad that our Canadian Thanksgiving is in October, at the cusp of all this change as it compels me to turn inward and reflect. In this process of reflecting, I cannot help but be grateful, even in these unique, unprecedented times in which we find ourselves.

Seeing the trees as they prepare for winter brings to mind some things I recently learned. Arborists know that after planting a tree, one must water it

heavily for the water to sink far below the surface of the ground. This enables the roots to grow deep into the ground. The deeper a tree's roots, the stronger the tree will be to withstand the storms and strong winds. Shallow watering a tree, on the other hand, does not allow the roots to sink deep into the earth. Instead, the roots will stay closer to the surface of the ground and when strong winds and storms happen, the more likely that tree will break or tip over.

I see this as a perfect metaphor for the spiritual life and faith formation. Sometimes we see people who only deal with faith on a surface level, and when the storms of life occur, they easily break. Yet, there are people we know whose faith is deep and extends far below the surface of what we are able to see. When they encounter life's storms, they remain steady in their faith, trusting in their God, and in their identity as God's chosen, God's beloved.

In a little book written in 1910, ***Power Through Prayer***, by Edward M. Bounds (1835-1913), he, a pastor, wrote passionately about how the preacher must root him/her/themselves in prayer. Prayer is what feeds us at our roots. His little book, intended as a guide for all preachers, is both a sobering judgment and a call to be authentic as faithful followers of Christ. Our work in Catholic education is not some heady, academic exercise. In the world we are known as teachers, Chaplains, administrators, clerics, Educational Assistants, custodians, support staff, senior administrators. Yet, to God, we are all the same: persons called to continue the work of Jesus, the Rabbi, God's Son, to reach the the lost, the least, and the last. Our roles are simply how we choose to respond to this divine call. We are not to use our titles to form a hierarchy, or to



View of a tree and its root system underground.
<https://nrtreeservices.com/blog/importance-strong-tree-root-systems/>

give us added status over and against another. These various roles are our vocation in which we choose to extend God's inclusive love, mercy and compassion to those in our care, both students and our colleagues.

Edward Bounds emphasizes that prayer is where we get our sustenance. He writes, "*The person makes the preacher [Catholic educator]. God must make the person.*" (6). Prayer is our time with God where we are intentional in *being* with God, allowing God to *form and shape us* in that divine love which enables us to nurture and sometimes excavate ours and others dignity and authenticity.

I mentioned earlier that Bounds can be sobering and hard-hitting in his little book and here is one that hit me rather hard: "*Every preacher [Catholic educator] who does not make prayer a mighty factor in his [her/their] own life and ministry is weak as a factor in God's work and is powerless to project God's cause in this world*" (8). The heart of the matter for Bounds is whether or not the preacher (and I've extended this to include all of us for we are all "preachers" in some way in Catholic education) has allowed the soul to admit brokenness, defeat, and has experienced complete surrender to and trust in God: "*but somehow the person, the inner person, in its secret places has never broken down and surrendered to God...*" (10).

Why am I going on and on about this little, old, book on prayer? Prayer is where we get our sustenance for what we do, not just for our schools, but for our families, for our communities and for ourselves. Prayer can take on many forms, so long as we are intentional in calling on Christ and spending time allowing Christ's love to penetrate our souls despite how unprepared, broken, depleted, anxious, angry, sad, thirsty, hungry, alone, lonely, frustrated, exasperated we may be feeling. We are living in times that are stomping on fragile nerves and the only thing that will get us through is God: "*I am the vine, you are the branches...*" (John 15.2) We can meet God in many ways, and God speaks to us in our own language: if we are partial to nature and camping, God will meet us there; if we are partial to running and exercise, God will meet us there; if we are partial to meditation and devotions, God will meet us there; if we are partial to working with our hands, God will meet us in that too.

As our part of the world prepares for another long, cold, dark winter, let us take our cue from the trees and sink our roots deep into God, in prayer, however that looks for each of us. The challenges of this world threatens to bend and break us, yet we will be able to withstand the pressures because of our faithfulness to prayer and emerge into Spring stronger, vibrant, full of hope which will in turn help shelter others in God's faithfulness and love.

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