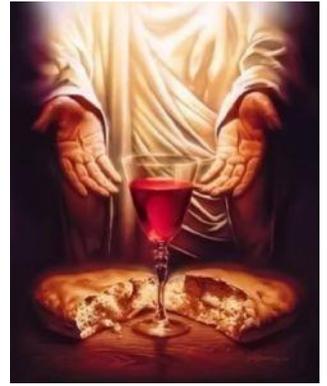


Grace Notes in Miniature,

Thursday June 18th, 2020

Dear Friends:

Yesterday I went on-line for a seminar on Sacraments for which I had signed up through an email I received inviting me to participate. I signed on and found myself in company with a number of people from across the US and one from Nova Scotia - at least those were the people who identified themselves. It quickly became obvious that the session was more geared towards parish ministers than towards schools, although, recognising that Catholic schools in the US are more tightly tied to parishes, I could see that the relationship between classroom teacher and parish catechist could make them one and the same. I thought I might get some pointers to use with our Home-School-Parish initiative so stayed on the session. After some introductory material on Sacrament, Story and Situation, we moved on to consider the bleeding of youth out of our parishes and discussed statistics that were pretty much matched across the board for US and Canadian experience. Then it started gently: the introduction of the solution which was to buy the materials of the publisher who apparently was funding the seminar. And the punchline came close to the end when we were offered \$200 off the \$499 price tag of an introductory catechetical kit as a reward for tuning in. As we use the Growing in Faith, Growing in Christ



Get out of the water little froggy

The water is approaching boiling point

program, produced by Pearson, Canada with direction from Canadian Bishops, and are very happy with it, I tuned out at that point. And spent some time thinking about the way I felt I had been played. Much like the frog in the pot of water, I naively ignored the warning signs that this was a sales pitch until it was made really clear; at least I got out of the water before it got too hot!¹

I know that that we in Catholic education join our clergy in being concerned about the difficulties of attracting and retaining parish attendance - faith practice, even from among families who choose to send their children to Catholic schools. And why do so many of our young people leave the Church after graduating from secondary school, even if they come from faithfully practising families? Those who stay will often refer to a teacher or chaplain who reached them personally, someone whose witness touched their lives. I am not sure that any

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boiling_frog#:~:text=The%20boiling%20frog%20is%20a,will%20be%20cooked%20to%20death.

new catechetical program is the answer. We may, instead, need to be focusing on the previous generation, the parents and even the teachers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9h9UjlkMM> I feel quite encouraged after participating in a very minor way in the production of a resource aimed primarily at teachers new to our Board; next we have to engage the families.

As my mind was jumping around like a frog, I moved on to thoughts about the CBC “Ideas” program I had listened to the night before: a replay of a Massey Lecture from 1985 in which Doris Lessing², novelist and Nobel laureate, spoke of “identity politics”, and the question of personal freedom and individual responsibility in a world increasingly prone to political violence and mass unrest.

It continues to be a serious challenge to many Christian leaders that there are so many divisions – and quite vitriolic ones – within Christianity, never mind the chasms between Christians and people of other faith groups. Interfaith dialogues often stumble over seemingly minor issues.

All religious groups are accused on occasion, often by atheists, of brainwashing children to “turn them” into followers of the faith, and this argument has even been applied to activities such as Christian Meditation. <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/195087>

Perhaps this is why we put so much emphasis on the Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations as we try to inculcate these in the way we teach in our schools. We are called to promote dialogue between faith and reason, to demonstrate that faith and science can coexist, to encourage students to ask questions. Socrates is quoted as saying, “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

We aim for every student to graduate as: A discerning believer formed in the Catholic Faith community.

An effective communicator.

A reflective, creative and holistic thinker.

A self-directed, responsible, lifelong learner.

A collaborative contributor.

A caring family member.

A responsible citizen.



Sometimes we have to wait for several years after our students have graduated to see the fruits of what we have planted. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrRYI_m3sIA

This led me to a prayer by Archbishop Oscar Romero, Bishop of San Salvador in El Salvador. He was martyred – assassinated – while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence on March 24th, 1980. Pope Francis canonized Romero as a saint in October 2018.

² <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/doris-lessing-dismantles-groupthink-in-her-1985-cbc-massey-lectures-1.5612960>

I think that this from quotations of Archbishop Romero is a very powerful teachers' prayer:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

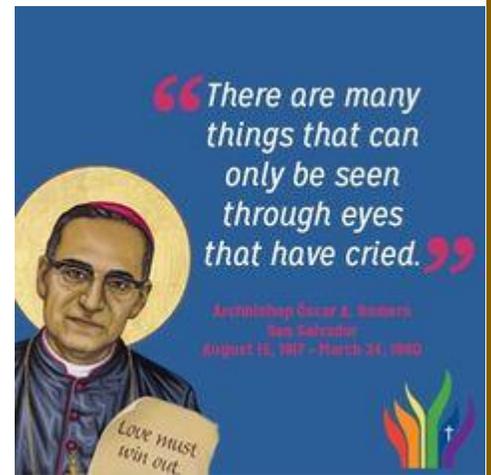
We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.³



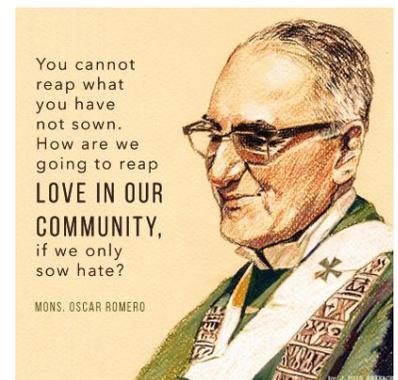
Bishop Robert Barron from WordonFire.org, preaching on Pentecost, asked why with all Christians in North American we weren't setting the world on fire with God's love instead of watching the fires of protest burn. It's a good question:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fouqn5Xg5-E>

As we head into the last week of what has been a very tumultuous year, with job action, Covid-19 and the protests in reaction to some tragic killings, we need to think about how we can teach and witness the love of Christ in our schools, homes, communities and parishes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8kvFtXphmMU>

With every blessing, Gillian



³ This prayer was first presented by Cardinal Dearden in 1979 and quoted by Pope Francis in 2015. This reflection is an excerpt from a homily written for Cardinal Dearden by then-Fr. Ken Untener on the occasion of the Mass for Deceased Priests, October 25, 1979. Pope Francis quoted Cardinal Dearden in his remarks to the Roman Curia on December 21, 2015. Fr. Untener was named bishop of Saginaw, Michigan, in 1980.