\*From a talk given on March 3, 2023 by Bishop Thomas A. Daly, Bishop of Spokane, to high school teachers in the Archdiocese of San Francisco at their annual convocation. The first part of this talk was unintentionally cut off from the audio recording from which this transcript was created. The transcript was edited for accuracy and clarity by Ryan Mayer and Valerie Schmalz.

Bishop Thomas Daly:

[Jesus’ encounter with the rich young man in Mark 10:17-31] illustrates the encounter that every student and teacher at a Catholic school can experience. In fact, I'm sure this occurs every day. But it reminds us again of our mission. "As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before him, and asked him, 'Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus answered him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the Commandments. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear a false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and your mother.' He replied and said, ‘teacher, all of these I've observed from my youth.' Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, 'You are lacking in one thing. Go sell what you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow.' At that statement, his face fell and he went away sad, for he had many possessions. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who will wilt under the Kingdom of God.' Disciples were amazed at his words."

I begin this presentation with those words because as I mentioned, though students may not, even in religious studies, ask that question, “but teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” But yet, fundamentally, that's at the heart of all Catholic education. It is about the salvation of souls. Now, I know from my time teaching at Marin Catholic and as president, that there are expectations in parents that we will get them into a good college first. But it's essential that we not lose sight of it. But why I begin with this passage and why it's so essential, is the three characteristics of this encounter that are very important and essential to Catholic school teaching and the ministry.

The first is we're told, and Mark is the most descriptive of the Gospel writers on this event, we're told first that Jesus loved him. Remember, Jesus said we must love others, love as he has loved. He never said ‘like’ other people. I think we have to keep that in mind, because in looking through the Gospels, there's probably half the time, Jesus did not like the apostles, because of the fact that they were hardheaded, he's speaking about charity and mercy and they want to call down fire. But he said ‘love.’ And ultimately, what Jesus, in the description, loving that man, he wanted what was best, which is his salvation. Now that sounds old school, but it's the truth. Wanting what's best is ultimately that someone have eternal life.

The second is important also, and you know this when you're a teacher. Jesus respected his freedom. Now again, my experience, and those of you in the theology departments would probably see this, maybe on retreats, young people are searching. In fact, there's a great line from Eucharistic prayer IV, "All who seek me with a sincere heart, and all those whose faith is known to you alone." Which you'd expect that that type of reflection occurs in our Catholic school classroom, and not just the religious studies department. And [Jesus] respected his freedom. Why is that essential? Because the freedom to love, the choice to love, is just that. And we know that when [Jesus] presents something, it may not always be accepted. But Jesus, again, respected his freedom.

This is the third, and this is often forgotten, Jesus challenged, but He did not compromise. And I think also often, that happens. He was compassionate always, but he never compromised. And this is the time both into my work as chair of the bishops’ committee on education, and what we're facing nationally, is support for the school setting to hold to what Christ taught. Jesus did not alter the message. Nonetheless, we're told that in this case, one of the few in all of scripture, where this man, what Jesus asked of him, was too much. Again, he approached Jesus first. In many ways, when students are in front of you in the classroom, though as I said, they may not in specifically these words, ask that question, it should be what every Catholic school provides, a learning environment that explores this.

"He went away sad, for his possessions were many." Now, this is not just a description of wealth. Though, in the three counties of the archdiocese, you would have levels of wealth. And one of the blessings of financial aid for Catholic schools is the ability to bring students in who may not come from such substantial needs. We might see that possessions means something else. It may mean someone's attachment to popularity, it may be a fear of speaking one's mind, out of fear of being canceled. So for anyone involved in the ministry of Catholic education, and wondering, "Is it worth it? Can I do it?" I'd ask you to reflect on this passage from Mark's Gospel. You could never accuse Jesus of false advertising. He made it very clear in that passage, ‘deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me,’ (Mark 8:34) that it was not going to be easy. We see this later on, as you might recall, in the sixth chapter of John’s Gospel, I'll speak a little bit at the end, in what is called the Bread of Life Discourse, which becomes the foundation of the Church's teaching on the Eucharist, the body, blood, soul, divinity of Christ.

That's an interesting passage where it becomes clear that some of his disciples, now these weren’t just listeners, these were people who had followed him for a while. And after Jesus speaks of his body and blood, he says those words, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you.' (John 6:53) Many of his disciples, when they heard this said, 'This is a hard saying, who can listen to it?' After this, many of his disciples drew back and no longer walked with him." What a great image, they no longer walked with him. "And Jesus said to the Twelve, 'Will you go away?' And Simon and Peter answered, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"

Once again, what Jesus was teaching was difficult for the listening audience. Lest we think it was only people outside the circle, Jesus's closest, that is the apostles, recall finally, the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel, it's the ascension. And this is very important. Often, people just speed through the Gospel, but there are phases that are so important, that speak to the experience of people today. Jesus is giving them the Gospel and the mission to go out to all the nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But then there's something very important. We're told that the apostles worshiped, but the very next phrase is, "But they doubted him." (Matthew 28:17) So there's always a struggle to believe, and whether it is the rich young man attached to his material possessions, but we know it means so much more, or it's a difficult teaching on the Eucharist, or it's his own closest friends, the first bishops, they worshiped, but they doubted him.

And again, from my nearly 20 years as a chaplain, as director of campus ministry, in teaching, and as president [of Marin Catholic], I know that there are enough of the staff of schools who have questions. This is why it’s more than just college prep. You have parents wanting us to deliver on the tuition they pay, we're getting them ready for college, yes. But again, as a Catholic school, there's something more for them. That I'm going to prepare you for college, but also prepare you for life. And it's just not 5 years, or 10 years, or 20, but certainly, it is eternal life.

In December, I was asked to participate in a conference in Rome, sponsored by Notre Dame University, specifically the School of Law, and an Australian Catholic University. And representatives from all the continents were there. I spoke on the topic of Catholic education and religious liberty, and how that's seen in the United States. And the dean of the law school himself spoke about his experience, growing up in Pittsburgh, and what he sees now as a dean of the law school. My responsibility was to speak on the issue in Catholic education, why it was founded, our elementary schools and secondary schools, what have been challenges we've faced historically over 200 years, what are the challenges we face now, and what are some of the blessings and successes of our schools. It's interesting that when we forget that our schools were founded especially to address hostility to Catholicism in the culture. And in many ways, that was an experience, certainly here in the West Coast, as you can see, in the United States, you can probably draw a line from Baltimore to St. Louis to San Francisco, and the church really did not experience persecution.

In fact, keeping in mind the first schools founded, that wasn't the case here, but certainly in the upper Midwest, the German Catholic community was at odds with the public school system, which embraced essentially Protestantism, and the schools became very important with religious coming from Europe. But that wasn't really the sole purpose of the school. It always had this mission of evangelization. I remember my time at Marin Catholic, when you said the word ‘evangelization,’ people might have thought you were one of these Bible belt preachers: "Praise the Lord!" and that scared people. It scared me. That's not what it's about. But it is the mission, back to that original interaction with Jesus and the rich young man about the saving of souls.

Now, we know that the curriculum is such that someone says, "Wait a minute, I teach art. Tell me how that is going to be an evangelization of souls. I teach science or math, I coach." And yet, we know that a cohesive unity in the Catholic school community has to be people who support the mission, when they themselves are Catholic or they are not Catholic but are hired to teach in a school environment, and how one shares in that mission.

The role of the Church in this mission of evangelization continues. It's why Ryan Mayer [Director of Catholic Identity Assessment & Formation, Archdiocese of San Francisco] made reference to Archbishop Miller’s ‘5 Essential Marks of Catholic Schools,’ but you can't lose sight of that: inspired by supernatural vision [Mark 1], founded on Christian anthropology [Mark 2], animated by communion and community [Mark 3], imbued with a Catholic worldview [Mark 4], and sustained by Gospel witness [Mark 5]. The vocation of the teacher is to help young people. You may have seen that study and perhaps you looked at it in your own school setting, and it was conducted by CAR and St. Mary’s Press and it was entitled [‘Going, Going, Gone.](https://www.smp.org/product/5926/Going-Going-Gone/#:~:text=Going%2C%20Going%2C%20Gone%20is%20the,Georgetown%20and%20Saint%20Mary's%20Press.)’ It was why young people leave the faith as young as 12. It came out about five years ago.

And it's very accurate. It reflects almost Jesus's parable of the sower and the seeds (Matthew 13). It divided, based upon hundreds of data points, into three categories of young people. First, there's the injured, the second is the drifter, and the third is the dissenter. Who were the injured? Young people who, maybe both parents were Catholic but maybe some adversity struck. Maybe they prayed the grandmother would get better and she died, a friend was killed in a car accident, parents divorced, a Catholic parent was unfaithful and left his mom, and they're injured. They equate the faith with the individuals who somehow let them down.

The second, the drifter, we can understand reflects the mobility of society. A young person grows up in a community, they're no longer in parish, someone gets a job transfer, they move from suburban St. Louis to a mega-parish outside Phoenix, and they're just drifting, it's hard to connect. And then the third we've always had, the dissenter. The dissenter argues, does not believe what the Church's teaching is on life issues, on marriage between a man and a woman, on refugees. Whatever it is, they disagree. But we've always had those we can see, and the examples I just gave you in Scripture, where people have left.

But if you look at those three categories, each one, there are two common factors. The first is the lack of an adult who could answer some of the questions they have. Some of you would say, "I too struggle with belief, but I trust the Holy Spirit Who is guiding the Church and I'm not going to give up." The second, they lack a peer who is committed to the Faith. And from my experience teaching, there were always a couple students in class, and I'm not talking about religious fanatics, 35 medals around their neck, I'm talking about good, average kids who try to live a Christian life and a life of prayer.

And they are very important. You see this at times in retreat experiences. Adults in their life who can help answer their questions, and are humbly committed. A Catholic school is a privileged place of providing welfare, and that's why it's so important, that all involved in this ministry either as a teacher or a coach or staff member or administration, not lose sight of that fact. The Bishops of United States issued a statement in the late '70s, and why was that significant? Because still, in the late '70s, most Catholic schools on the elementary and secondary level still had religious [men and women], perhaps even by then, they were still at least one-third or even half of the staff. And there was always debate, ‘can we continue to have Catholic schools without religious?’ And thank God, at least in the West, the answer is ‘yes, we can,’ but it requires good formation. Not so much in the northwest. There was this movement, and I came into Spokane, and there were half the schools in 2015 that there were in 1968. And I fortunately have a great woman as director of Catholic education who came in in my second year [as bishop of Spokane] and working with principals and meeting with pastors and then staff development, had made the priority of Catholic education the diocesan priority. But it wasn't the case before that, because the mindset was, "Well, we really don't need schools." Well, we do need schools and again, where this document in the late '70s which said that the Church establishes her own schools because she “considers them as a privileged means of promoting formation of the whole person, since the school was a center in which a specific concept of the world of humanity and history is developed and conveyed.” ([The Catholic School](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html), 8)

Just recently in 2022, the Holy See’s Congregation for Catholic Education, which is now the Dicastery for Catholic Education and Culture, reinforced this [in [The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue](https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/29/220329c.html)]. It really highlighted that role of evangelization, that it cannot be separated out from the mission of the school. And sometimes, again, you’re all diocesan schools, although two schools [Sacred Heart Cathedral Perp and Archbishop Riordan] have roots in religious orders and two in the diocesan clergy [Marin Catholic and Junipero Serra], there can be a tendency to hang on to the charism of the religious order, forgetting that the founder or the foundresses of the religious orders were motivated to do what they did by Jesus Christ. Sometimes people quote the founder [of the religious order] but the founder quoted Jesus Christ.

And again, this document that came out from Rome [[The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue](https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/29/220329c.html)] redmined that we cannot ignore the culture. The culture confronts us each day. And we know this, we see this in the United States alone, in many ways, it’s people without hope. The Wall Street Journal had an article about a study done by the CDC and then one by Drake University in Iowa, on the sense of despair and depression and hopelessness in young people, primarily in young women. And it talked about a third who spoke of having serious thoughts of suicide, although the Drake University study commented on the fact that when suicide occurs, more often than not it’s in young men rather than women. In my own diocese [of Spokane] we have a bit of a problem that we had to face on the west side of Washington State, no surprise, there was this effort for tearing down dams regarding salmon.

Unfortunately, all four of the dams were in my diocese, and I had to say if it's a difference between let the salmon flow and let my farmers grow, I must let my farmers grow, because I said, "Why don't we deal with what's pressing across all of our 3 dioceses in the state of Washington? It's the challenge of mental illness." Now, you in the classroom, or perhaps as counselors, perhaps on retreats, you know that this is ever present. In the article, an advocate who was a former teacher, said, "If we only fund these programs, then we can remedy this." Well, there is a need to fund programs for mental illness, to have counselors available, and I'd argue for that. And we have Catholic charities and Catholic healthcare still in eastern Washington in the whole state of Washington, that's extensive and very much needed. But funding can only do so much. In our anthropology and belief that we are created in God's image and likeness and beloved sons and daughters of God, I believe that if we live that and we model it, much of the social division in our culture–such as division over race, economics, status, documentation–that conflict would be lessened.

Now, lest it sound like this is a fire and brimstone homily, if you read the scripture, the devil is described as a liar and a murderer. But if you see, and I know just as a priest, as a bishop, that what Jesus spoke about in scripture, is, sadly, always present: the work of the devil, who divides, distracts, and discourages, and how often in communities of faith, and in schools, there can be division. There is distraction and there can be discouragement. But Catholic schools have that unique opportunity to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, and to do so in the spirit of the Lord.

Too often, we live our lives and we claim it's hope, it's really optimism. Optimism is wishful thinking. Hope is reality grounded in faith. I'll give you an example of optimism. There was a student at Marin Catholic in my early years who was kicked out, actually was just asked to leave. We don't kick you out of the Catholic school, just ask you to leave. [laughter] Why? Because this student stole the master key. This was in the '90s. And I remember, I was at a Saturday night dinner in Marin County and I brought up what had happened and my first pastor was present, Monsignor [James] Keane who taught at Marin Catholic in the '50s. And I said the name, and he says, "We kicked his father out!" [laughter]

He had pulled a starter pistol on a priest, which had blanks in it, but he fired it and the priest threw himself against the chalkboard and collapsed. And from that moment on, they had lost respect for him. [The student] called me a few years later, saying, “I’d like you to write me a letter for Georgetown Law School.” I said, "We kicked you out." He said, "No, it was an involuntary transfer." [laughter] That was optimism. Hope is reality grounded in faith. These are difficult times we live in, but nevertheless, Christ is with us.

As I quoted at the beginning, Matthew 28, “they worshiped but they doubted.” The line at the very end is a source of hope for all of us, to know that “I'm with you to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20) So Christ is very much present in us. Our schools are more than just a social work agency aimed at curing society's illness. Now this is coming from the Holy See which, when I was at that conference in Rome, Australia was talking about what they’re doing on gender issues, and there was, I remember a sister from Africa and she said, we were talking about the challenges, that, "Our greatest challenge is the safety of the young women in our school, that they would not be kidnapped and raped or even murdered by Islamic extremists in the villages. What we want is just safety and to be left alone to do what our mandate is, to teach Jesus Christ."

Europe in many ways has had some experience of secularism like we have in the United States, but unlike the United States where our schools receive, as you know, no government funding, we have that freedom, and I spoke about what’s called the ministerial exception, that is that all teachers in a Catholic school and all staff have a role to play in its mission. And when we begin to compartmentalize things so it doesn't really matter because he or she doesn’t teach theology, we've created a huge problem, because there must be a communal aspect of this mission.

And I know from my own time in teaching, one of the finest individuals as a teacher, wasn't a Catholic man, he was a very good Christian, and in the non-religious studies department modeled a true belief that our dignity is as beloved sons and daughters of God. And that's the importance of the role of personal witnesses, as Ryan [Mayer] quoted from St. Paul VI, that role of teacher as witness [[Evangelii nuntiandi](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html), 41). Now, I also know, and human nature is such, that there are those here who have a series of questions about God, about the Church, about the Lord, the role one plays, and “can’t I just be left alone to teach my subject?”

But as St. Augustine said, ‘our souls are restless until they rest in thee.’ ([Confessions](https://www.vatican.va/spirit/documents/spirit_20020821_agostino_en.html), 1, 1.5) What is so essential in the role of the teacher is, if you think about it, in many ways, the time we live in is a greater challenge than the early Church in the first-century. Prior to that, the pagan world did not have the revelation of God in his Son, Jesus Christ. Today, there is the rejection of the “Word made flesh, Who dwelt among us,” (John 1:14) and no amount of books, although a solid formation is important, and books that teach what the Church teaches are so important, it is that witness that is an example.

I’m sure all of you have retreat programs and you know how important that is, but that early Church and the faith that was passed before the Gospels and scripture were put into writing, was passed along by the example, the witness. And once again, that study that confirms it, Going, Going, Gone, the example of an individual, who still asks and has questions but in humility, trusts. That is, I mentioned, that line from Eucharistic prayer IV, "All who seek me with a sincere heart, and all those whose faith is known to you all."

Don Richie was a longtime teacher at Marin Catholic and became principal for about three-and-a-half years until he had pancreatic cancer and died. I remember those last years when he was still healthy but he was principal, we had many discussions about faith. And I often found that with him, similar to my own dad, there was a lack of recognition that the faith that we both had was strong enough. And I think in your communities, at your school, I hope there's opportunities for you, opportunities to reflect on the gift of faith.

The Church has always taught that each person has enough faith to be saved, but faith is different in loved ones. You have, in a given family, you could have one who is a strong believer and one who struggles, same parents, same education, same witness at home, it's just, it's different and nevertheless, the example of a personal witness. I often speak about essential qualities for Catholic dioceses, Catholic schools, and certainly our individual lives. It's a little harder though, because education strives for success, and it looks for markers and grades. The danger is that achievement can give way to arrogance, and what is so important for a Catholic school and especially those entrusted with guiding the young, is to be humble.

Now, when we're humble, we see as Paul said, that all that we have, we receive: “Why should we boast, except to boast in Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:31) The French schools of spirituality as evidenced in St. Francis de Sales, in St. Paul, stress often humility. Certain religious orders, not represented here presently, lack humility. Because [they think that] if you're successful, they made you successful. I think the model, and it’s more the Vincentian-LaSallian model that should be lived, is what St. Paul means when he talks about humility.

The devil doesn't know how to deal with humility.He’s prideful. Since he does not know how to deal with humility, he cannot combat it. So humility is very important. That doesn't mean we don't strive for excellence. We can be excellent without being elite. Like those bumper stickers on the back of your Subaru or Prius, “my child is an honor student.” Honestly, how many of you have that on the back of your Prius? You should be ashamed of yourself. [laughter] Humility is very important because when you're humble, it allows us to be grateful. And humble and grateful people are generous. And the effective people in the ministry of Catholic education are teachers, women and men, who are called to model that humility and that gratitude and that generosity.

I know that there are great challenges that are faced. It might be easier to remain faithful to the mission of the Catholic school in a community that is more traditional. But nonetheless, this is the present moment. I remember hiring teachers: “We'd like to go and work in the Bay Area, but can't we just work in Lincoln, Nebraska?” We're kind of scared.” I remember meeting with a graduate from a very good college who said, "We really don't want to go there, it's kind of scary." I said, "Well, it's a bit more beautiful than where you want to go." "Yeah, but it's tough." It is tough. And you know that because again, you’re right there, now.

The challenge is to remain, again, faithful, being a witness, and to speak the truth with charity. Sometimes the thought is “we have to come in with a flamethrower.” I had to speak to a couple of my pastors, younger guys, and they're good men, but I said, "There's only three reasons to decisively make a change when you first come into a parish: if there's heresy being taught, if there is immoral behavior being conducted, or if there's theft or dishonesty. Just because you don't like the song ‘All are Welcome in This Place’ does not mean you get to throw all the books out in the first week of arrival, alright?” And I had a pastor who did that. So we teach them that truth with charity. In fact, the most charitable thing we can do is bring people, by our example, to Christ.

Unfortunately, we know this culture in which we are in, if you make people unsafe, you can be canceled. The former president ofDePaul University is a Vincentian and he was in charge of and Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, and he said the first time he went on the faculty and he served as president in the time he took on this directorship, he said, "You used be able to debate things in class. But now, if people decide that it's not safe, they want to end the conversation."

Ohio State has a Newman Center that had a religious order that, for a long time, staffed it. A new bishop came in and replaced it and he brought in one of his own priests from the diocese of Columbus to staff it, and the priest who happened to be in charge was the director of evangelization. A new bishop from the South, very educated, he was a seminary professor, the son of immigrants, He said, "The university and the apostolate of the Newman Center at the university exists to guide you as they discover God, as they move from faith by birth, faith in transition, and, God-willing, faith by choice.” And so he made this change and I was reading the interview and they interviewed a woman, probably in her mid-to-late-thirties, who works in the Newman Center at Michigan, and she said, “today’s young people, remember, they're coming from a culture that is shaped in so many ways by social media. They don't have that foundation, that's why young people are so drawn to Eucharistic adoration, being quiet before the Lord.” And she said, "But they're different. They actually want more traditional spirituality and I think we have to see where they are and be with them."

Well, they interviewed someone else who used to go to the Newman Center and said, "I don't feel safe there." Now, I think we throw that word around, safe or victim, and it's just because you don't like what's happened, you really take power from those words. Someone not feeling safe is someone whose life is at risk, at danger of injury or death. It's not someone that you just don't like what's happening. So this is the culture that we find ourselves in, and we are, by virtue of the mission of the school, we teach the truth with charity.

The Ancient Greeks believe that it is the sign of an educated mind entertaining an idea without adopting it. In so many ways, that used to be the belief of the universities, but how often we can't talk about certain things because it makes us feel, again, unsafe. The greatest opportunity being a witness is to help another person come to know Christ. And again, the Chairmanship [of the US Bishops’ Committee on] Catholic education is a three-year term, I’m in my second year. Again, the issues, in the 70’s there was this issue of “can we operate Catholic schools without religious?” Then there was the issue of tuition, and then there was a really kind of, in the late '90s, early 2000s a lot of success stories, especially the Church remaining committed in inner-cities.

And then all of a sudden, it was governance. “If you change the governance of school, if you move governance away from the parish, away from the diocese, it would solve all the problems.” No, it didn’t. The big problems we are facing now is the formation of lay staff, administration and teachers, and is dealing with the complex issue of gender and this movement now about charter schools. Each generation in each age has its challenges that we face, but we can't lose sight of that role of evangelization.

“Put out into the deep” from Luke's Gospel, guides us (Luke 5:4). We know that account from Scripture. "After he had finished speaking, he said, 'Simon, put out in some deep water and lower your nets for a catch.' Simon said, 'Master, we worked hard in the night and caught nothing. But at your command, I will lower the nets.' When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing. They signaled to their partners in the boat to come and to help them. They came and filled their boats so that they were in danger of sinking. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell to his knees to Jesus and said, 'Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.'" (Luke 5:4-8)

That becomes again the mission, he commissions the apostles to do something different, to trust. And how often in a school setting do you get so caught up in, again, achievement, and discipline, and personnel, that we lose sight of how important it is to trust, to trust in God's mercy? Schools can be turned around and go from a place of chaos to a place where it fulfills the mission with leadership that both challenges and supports, and not everybody can fit in this. The image I use is the mending of nets. Jesus, remember, comes to those first apostles, he meets James and John and what are they doing? They’re with their father, mending the nets.

I love that image because this time in the Church, we are mending the nets. But I am not naive to think that everybody was working as diligently at mending the nets, there might be someone in the boats who is fearful of going fishing again. They're discouraged, "I don't want to go out and fish." They're scared. There might be someone else in that boat who's lazy, "Fishing's too much effort, I want to try carpentry." But, and I don’t want to rain on anyone's parade, but there are actually people sometimes in our boat who are cutting the nets as we are mending the nets on the other side. The importance of being supportive in the mission of schools, you can't deny that.

We need to be careful of not running to extremes. We can't be a school that is all about social justice or a school is all about piety with no relationship to a lived faith. St.Elizabeth Ann Seton, who, as we know, is patron saint of Catholic schools, especially elementary schools in the United States, had the great line, “our Savior is never in extremes.” Extremes are easy, but there are no easy approaches outside of our trust in the Lord. We need to be very careful that we don't let evangelization become subject to compartmentalization, as I mentioned before. “That's good for you, you're in the campus ministry department or you are in the religious studies or theology[department], but it doesn't really affect me.” We all have a role to play.

Finally, I'd like to say something about the Year of the Eucharist. I hope that all of you have heard of that. The Year of the Eucharist, some say is because of the studies done and the belief in the Real Presence of Jesus Christ body, blood, soul and divinity has declined greatly in the United States. And in many ways, perhaps it has. Part of it is when the mass and the Eucharist as the “source and summit of our faith” as the Second Vatican Council taught (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324), became “Father’s own little show.” The personality of the priest took over.

Now, some of you may have been in masses where, in the the beginning of mass, "Is it your birthday?" and people put their hands up and the microphone's walking back and forth like it's a game show. On the other hand, there have been times where the mass, you wonder if the priest or the bishop knows that Christ rose and that he's not dead, but the priest or the bishop almost appears to be near death. So the Eucharistic Revival will culminate in the gathering of thousands in Indianapolis in 2024.

But in the Catholic school community, it has a privileged place, again, for young people with their questions, and many times their questions and their struggles to discover Christ in a very different way, to come to realize that He is present body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. St. Thomas Aquinas who is the patron saint of the university spoke about the Eucharist as spiritual food, nourishment. I know this teaching is tough for a variety of reasons, what students are going through. Well-intentioned parents want something more for their kids when they themselves, they might not have been formed in the faith. And we know what social media does to the self-esteem issues of students and young people, especially young women.

Again, when Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them," (Matthew 19:14) He has given us a foundation, role, and responsibility we all have to help young people come to know Christ. Sometimes pastors will say, "Why don't those parents in Catholic schools' kids go to mass?" Well, we need to help get their kids at mass, you'll get their parents to go to mass. Not all perfectly, but it will help, because I believe that young people have a grace. They’re not simple, but there's an innocence and it's meant to help them come to know Christ. How will they know Christ if we don't provide?

Jesus comes into the Eucharist in a most imminent presence. Before I preach, I often say a prayer, “Lord, what do we need to say and what do they need to hear?” I encourage you, when you have difficult needs or difficult encounters with students, you might say the same thing. “Lord, what do we need to say, and what does this student need to hear?”

For those of you Catholic here who maybe question whether the mass is important, I'd ask you to really humbly look at that. As you know, the Eucharist means ‘Thanksgiving’ and it’s that same connection: humility, gratitude, generosity. We can’t be generous, I believe, if we don't ourselves express that gratitude. As you say, we cannot give what we do not have.

In the preface of martyrs in the Eucharistic prayer, there was an early translation you don't hear as much now, but it's a great line and reminder, “you choose the weak and make them strong in bearing witness to them.” I think in many ways, our questions are not ways to cut us off from God. And the 37th Psalm "I stumbled, but did not fall for you held me by the hand." That's so important to know thinking about the Lord is with us.

I was talking to a priest the other night and he said, “I’ve been focusing on the fact that Jesus fell three times.” And I said, "Why?" He said, "Because if he just fell once, all right, it was once. But three times, it's a good image for us to reflect upon, especially in Lent, when we stumble and fall in our commitment to Christ when we question and when we struggle." Remember, Jesus himself both in the temptation in the desert, and then the Garden, wanted the cup of temptation to be taken from him. It wasn't easy for him, nor has it been easy for us.

So in Catholic school, you as teachers, administrators and staff, we have to nourish these souls and intellects of students with what has been described as the bountiful banquet of humanities and sciences, rich history, the inspiration of art and music, to cultivate a thirst for knowledge again, then leads us to Jesus Christ. T. S. Eliot's great line, "Where is the wisdom we've lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we've lost in information?" Modern education, I think, is this constant deluge of information instilled that can be frightening. But education aimed at fulfilling human dignity and developing what is most human in our students and giving them the aptitude to see and to notice, there's a connection between education and worship.

Worship is the highest form of knowledge, opinion is the lowest form. But the teacher who guides a student in an understanding of how we're meant to see the world with a sincere heart, helps them. We raise them, in ways we will only see in years and beyond. Again, I've got another quote from T. S. Eliot, "We have the experience but miss the meaning." The Eucharist which unites us is not meant to be just an event that happens in church or the gym. Augustine, in his Easter sermon, addressing those who were baptized the night before, asked them to consider how the bread that would become the body of Christ was made, and how they, the newly baptized, went through a similar process, how they did it. He states that as the grain was ground into flour, they were ground down through Lenten fasting. As water was poured over flour to form the dough, the water of baptism was poured over them. As the dough is baked into the loaf, they are filled with the Holy Spirit and formed into the Body of Christ. When mass is concluded, we often hear from the priest that we can go forth to love and serve the Lord and one another.

But going forth is what each Catholic school, though it is not the church or mass per se, but when the student is learning in that Catholic school environment, at the end of the day they are going to go forth, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit. If we teach that the sacrament, and the Eucharist is a sacrament of love and sign of unity, and a bond of charity, that's what we need to hear in a time and place where even in the church, there is great confusion and division. And really, the church at any age. One of the earliest saints challenged the Christians, saying, "You've tasted the blood of the Lord yet you do not recognize your brother. You dishonor this table and you do not judge worthy of sharing your food with someone. God freed you from your sins and invited you here, but you have not become merciful.” (St. John Chrysostom, qtd. in Catechism, 1397) The Eucharist which does not pass over until the practice of love is fragmented.

So when we hold the Eucharist, it is not meant for us just to keep it to ourselves. The Catholic school community and its teaching has that privileged place of helping our young people at age appropriate come to understand a bit more of why a relationship with Christ is important. I'd like to conclude with a prayer of Elizabeth Ann Seton, patroness of the schools in the United States. Divine savior, let our faith be an acceptable offering while we adore you in your Real Presence, though yet unseen, it is a delight to call you, with St. Thomas, my Lord and my God. Thank you.