

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME [C]

Jeremiah 1:4-5, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 13:4-13; Luke 4:21-30

National Catholic Schools' Week – 2010

I imagine that my growing up as a Catholic Christian in Appleton, Wisconsin, was quite like growing up as a Catholic Christian in and around Sandusky. We all especially were proud of our Catholic marking. In fact, we *wanted* people to know we were Catholic. We *wanted* people to ask which parish was ours just as we *wanted* people to ask which school was ours.

For us at St. Bernadette School even the uniforms we wore let us show off our pride - after all, we wanted to be known as Catholic kids!

Of course, let it be noted that the uniforms also saved parents lots of money and eliminated arguments at home about fashion trends and inappropriate attire!

Regular events at St. Bernadette School helped us feel even more proud and special about our Catholic identity. Holy Days like All Saints and Immaculate Conceptions helped us to learn God's truth that *faith works wonders*.

First Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation truly were momentous occasions for everyone in the Catholic school – not just something happening at church.

Just like Sandusky Central Catholic School today, at St. Bernadette the kids in grades K-8 all went to school in the same place. [Most of you know that SCCS offers a comprehensive K-12 education on the same campus]. I remember looking up to the older students who interacted with us and learning many valuable lessons from them. How proud and special it was when I finally grew to be one of the older students who helped younger ones learn in their classrooms and pray at weekly Mass!

Prayers like the Our Father, Hail Mary and Act of Contrition were taught to all and memorized quickly. During the school day we became more and more comfortable worshipping God in other ways including the Rosary, Benediction, Stations of the Cross, Blessing of Throats, May Crowning along with quiet times with the Blessed Sacrament in church, Reconciliation each month and Mass every week. Every Catholic school day still begins the same way as it did when I was a kid, first with the Sign of the Cross and prayer, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Sadly, in those days Christian terminology was deemed to be a grave threat to our Republic. No less than the US Supreme Court outlawed prayer in public schools. Later court rulings even would outlaw a moment of silent prayer for

interested students, faculty and staff during the public school day and at public school events.

Years ago at St. Bernadette, just as it is today at Sandusky Central Catholic School, every December we joyously celebrated a grand event called the *Christmas Program*. Every student wanted to be the one selected to place the Baby Jesus in the Crib. The Christmas Program was followed by *Christmas Break*. In the springtime, the meaning of Holy Week was taught and its powerful message experienced before we took off for *Easter Break*.

Far from seeing God and Christian prayers and Christian virtues as dangerous threats to the proper schooling of our children, Catholic schools educate our kids in such a wondrous way that they come to view the world as God's good creation. For example, let's discuss further the topic of ecology. In contrast to its politically trendy presentation in public school, I learned long ago in Catholic school that as stewards of God's magnificent creation all people have the duty and responsibility to use well and wisely that which God has given.

Later in life I attended two large public high schools in two different states. I must say, that the culture in both public schools was quite different from my Catholic grade school years. For sure, I learned the sciences and other disciplines and was prepared well for academic success in college and beyond. And yet there are moments – usually they are surprising and unanticipated moments – when I feel like something still is missing:

- From not having been allowed to pray during my high school days and events
- From not have been allowed to receive timely and needed spiritual counsel from respected teachers, counselors and coaches
- From not having been challenged to grow in Christian understanding and Christian confidence during school hours
- From not having been inspired during school to imitate Jesus Christ
- From not having been taught in high school that the real and lasting happiness I so deeply desired to find only is found in God