

Address to Principals and Teachers of the Catholic School System of the Diocese of Fort Worth

August 7, 2017
Nolan Catholic High School
Fort Worth

"THE EYES OF THE WORLD SEE NO FURTHER THAN THIS LIFE, AS MINE SEE NO FURTHER THAN THIS WALL WHEN THE DOOR IS CLOSED. THE EYES OF THE CHRISTIAN SEE DEEP INTO ETERNITY."

— ST. JOHN VIANNEY

The mission of Catholic education in the schools of the Diocese of Fort Worth is to open the doors so that our students can see further than the walls that otherwise would enclose them in darkness. What does seeing deep into eternity really look like? It involves being able to recognize, to appropriate, and to cherish the eternal and transcendental goods of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. These three transcendental goods depend upon each other within the envelope of eternity.

TRUTH. We see truth through the door of knowledge. This is opened to us through such academic classes as theology, philosophy, history, logic, science, mathematics, and robotics. Other supportive disciplines include the norms of grammar and of phonics, the protocols of classroom behavior, and the rules and strategy of athletics. Truth enables us to belong to a community with a shared history that is greater than ourselves or that of our own fabrication. Truth provides order and peace through justly measured prioritization. Truth enables us to recognize and to meet those human needs that we cannot meet by our own individual power because truth provides an objective measure by which we can agree on priorities among shared goals and discern the appropriate means to attain those goals. Truth opens the door that enables us to see deeply into eternity through the wall of egotism and selfish interests.

Without truth offered to us through such studies as theology, philosophy, science, history, mathematics, grammar, and the discipline of deportment, a selfish narrative takes over and dominates each one of us and damages the common good of our society. When this happens, our role as educators becomes diminished to the role of an arbiter who capriciously balances self-interests among individuals competing for attention. In this situation, each of us educators very soon and sadly becomes one of

those individuals with our own egoistic interests set in the balance for attention.

BEAUTY. We see the eternal good of beauty through art, music, literature, poetry, and drama. Beauty, closely related to the truth, affords us hope. Beauty enables us to share the joy of immaterial goods that are beyond those material goods that can be measured and quantified. The studies and practice of art and literature at every level of education opens the doors that allow our students to pass through the walls of materialism and consumerism. Arts and literature open the door of beauty, the door hinged upon truth, and provide an egress through the wall of selfish narrative that otherwise would lock us into the darkness.

Without the good of beauty, such disciplines as art, music, literature, poetry, and drama become only raw spectacle that shocks us with fear and desensitizes us to hope. Without the good of authentic beauty, such disciplines as art, music, literature, poetry, and drama become valued only if they can be quantified and sold. This replaces character with celebrity in the fiber of the artist's profile.

GOODNESS. We experience goodness through the study and practice of religion. Religion holds us together with the eternal. Religion offers the encounter spiritually with that which I cannot manipulate or control but can only worship —God. Religion enables us to see the goodness of the world because of its status of being created by God — “and God saw that it was good.” Religion enables us to see clearly the dignity of the person because of the human person's being created in the image and likeness of God. Religion enables me to witness and value with reverence the goodness of embodied human beings differentiated naturally for a procreative purpose — “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Religion enables me to see the goodness of this person who has a name and belongs to a family. It enables me to encounter this person who is my classmate, or my student, or my teacher, or my colleague, not as an object but as a human subject making present the image and likeness of God. Religion enables me to see myself as created by God for a purpose.

Without the door of religion, our students remain trapped behind the wall of hedonism — where goodness becomes valued in things or persons only by the limited measurement of sense experience — that which is physically pleasurable or emotionally stimulating.

The mission of education is to unlock and to open these doors of truth, beauty, and goodness. Without these doors to be opened, our students and their parents (and ourselves) remain locked behind the walls of egoism, materialism, consumerism, and hedonism. Without these doors to be opened, education loses its mission and its identity with the result being that education becomes simply the training in skills needed

for one to navigate the darkened room or only to build other walls within the darkened room.

Our students and their parents deserve to have these doors opened to them — even if they do not know that the doors exist or that they are in fact enclosed behind these walls. It is our responsibility to inform them, to open the doors for them, and to teach them how to keep the doors open.

Thus, we cannot give what we do not have. I ask each of us at the start of this academic year to examine our consciences and our lives. Where does each of us encounter truth, beauty, and goodness in our own lives? What literature do we read? What music informs our soul? What do we study to expand our knowledge? What do we believe as our religion and how do we practice it? Has my own education become reduced to simply skills training and technique? Has my vocation as an educator become reduced to being a job to make ends meet?

The beginning of the academic year is a wonderful opportunity for each of us to put away bad habits and to renew our vocational life as educators by which we have been called to enable our students to see deeply into eternity. The transcendental goods of truth, beauty, and goodness save us from the darkness of egotism, materialism, consumerism, and hedonism and provide us with a clear measurement for the Christian virtues of faith — by which we know truth; hope — by which we perceive beauty; and charity — in which we encounter goodness in communion with our neighbor in the very life of God in Whom our souls find rest.

+ Bishop Michael F. Olson