

Passing on the Faith

An Imperative, Not an Option

"Hear 0 Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. Bind them at your wrist as you sign, and let them be as a pendent on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates." (Deut 6: 4-9)

If we really believe, passing on the faith is not an option. It is an imperative. In Deuteronomy 6 we are given the commandment to pass on the faith to new generations. God charged Israel with the great commandment and wants us to keep those words in our hearts. Get them inside of you and then get them inside of your children, God is telling us. Talk about them wherever you are; when you are at home, as you walk down the street. Talk about them from the time you get up in the morning to when you fall into bed at night. Tie them on your hands and foreheads as a reminder. Write them on the doorpost and the bathroom mirrors in your home and on your city gates or the dashboards of your cars. In other words, know and live out the great commandment and pass it on to your children and to your children's children. It kind of kills the theory of a private faith doesn't it? If we are faithful and our faith in God means something to us, we will strive to follow His word and live out what it says. Then our faith is anything but private. We pass it on. We talk about it. We tell the story of our faith to our children and to the people God has put in our paths.

Passing on faith is not merely a human enterprise. It is God's work. Even when we fall down on the job, God never sleeps.

In The Power and the Glory the English author, Graham Greene, tells the story of a "whiskey priest," the only priest who did not flee the persecution of the Church in the Province of Tabasco, Mexico. He is hunted down like a dog and finally caught because they tricked him into coming to attend the needs of a dying man. In prison the army lieutenant taunted him because he had not been a particularly good or virtuous priest, and bragged that his government would do much more for the people than the Church could do.

The priest said, "I am certainly not a saint, I am not even brave. That's the difference. It's no good your working for your ends to better society unless you are a good man and have good men in your party. And we know that there won't always be good men in your party. Then you'll have all the old starvation and exploitation. But it doesn't matter so much that I am a whiskey priest, and a coward and all the rest. I can put God into a man's mouth just the same—and I can give him God's pardon. It wouldn't make any difference to that if every priest in the Church was like me."
The point that the priest is trying to make is that passing on the faith is God's enterprise. Sometimes priests and bishops and religious and parents may seem to fail miserably, but then it does depend entirely on us. Having said that, I know that we all have to do a better job, but that happens only when we become more pliable clay in the potter's hands.

**Christ the Center**

The great Evangelizer is Christ, the Word made flesh, the missionary of the Father, the anointed of the Spirit who founds the Church, as an extension of Himself. Because the incarnation has taken place and is a present reality, our Redeemer lives and He continues to call us to discipleship, to friendship, to holiness.

As our Holy Father reminds us: Two thousand years of history have passed without diminishing the freshness of that *today* which resounds in the Gospels when the angels proclaimed, "For *today* is born to you . . . " or when Jesus inaugurates His public life in the synagogue in Nazareth and declares, "*Today* this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Two thousand years have passed, but sinners can still rejoice at the consoling words of Jesus on the cross to the repentant sinner, "*Today* you shall be with me in paradise."

Today this same Jesus gathers us in His Church, instructs us with His Gospel, and nurtures us with His sacraments. Having come to share our life, He invites us to share His mission, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Three years ago I was sent by the Holy See to prepare a report on the two seminaries in Cuba. I was pleased to find 60 seminarians in theology and some 20 in philosophy. I was amazed to hear their stories. Ninety percent of the young men were converts who became Catholics during and after their university studies and after years of indoctrination in Marxism that was reinforced by family, by peers, by the mass media, by the educational system. They knew very few Catholics and everything they were told about the Church was bad. Yet somehow the grace of God touched their hearts and lead them into the Church and into the seminary at the cost of enormous personal sacrifices. It made me think of Jesus' words that God can change these stones into sons of Abraham.

I have always loved Saint Luke's Gospel and his Acts of the Apostles, which he wrote as a continuation of the Gospel. In Luke's Gospel, we see the action of the Spirit: overshadowing Mary at the annunciation; leading Jesus into the wilderness; anointing Jesus at His Baptism; and accompanying Him in His ministry. In Acts, Luke gives the history of the Church in which he shows how the body of Christ relives the great events in the life of Christ and how the Spirit is guiding and accompanying the Church. I have always been struck by the fact that, although Saint Luke composes the Gospel and Acts so carefully, he ends the Acts of the Apostles quite abruptly. I think he is telling us that the Acts continue in our lives as members of the Church. The story goes on, the Spirit is still guiding and accompanying us, the Good News is still being proclaimed, we are still
united in following the teaching of the Apostles, in fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in prayer.

The Church's impulse to evangelize, to pass on the faith, to fulfill the great commissioning to make disciples of all nations begins at Pentecost. Indeed Pentecost is a sort of paradigm for the Church. It was a moment of crisis, of fear, and of confusion. The Church came together to pray. Our tradition claims they gathered at the place of the first Eucharist, in the company of Mary and of Peter and the Apostles. And they prayed intensely. Their prayer opened their hearts to the Spirit that filled their hearts, enlightened, embolden, and energized them to go out and share what they had received and thousands were baptized by the man who people first thought was a drunk.

**The Challenge of Pentecost**

Today passing on the faith must take place in a Pentecost experience. It begins with intense prayer—together, in the company of Mary and with the ministry of Peter and the apostolic college. Passing on the faith requires a courageous proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, a call to conversion and an invitation to discipleship and a challenge to be on fire with a mission that we received from the risen Lord.

The outreach of Pentecost is to all the pilgrims and strangers in Jerusalem. It is not about ethnocentricity or cultural Catholicism or Western civilization. The outreach of Pentecost is Catholic. It is directed to everybody and although we may speak different languages, the power of love overcomes every barrier and frontier.

Pentecost is about being the body of Christ, God's people, part of a community. It is not enough only to be "spiritual" as people say today. Pentecost is not about a religion of the "warm fuzzies." It is about answering a call to a way of life and to be part of something bigger than ourselves. At Pentecost the Church began to pass on the faith, to make disciples of all nations.

We need to teach people, especially children and young people how to pray. If we do not go to our chamber and shut the door and pray to our father in secret, we shall never form part of a worshipping community.

The Apostles said to Jesus: "Master, teach us how to pray as John taught his disciples." We need to be men and women of prayer and we need to be teachers of prayer. It is impossible to pass on the faith without forming people in the life of prayer. Faith without prayer is a contradiction: it is information, it is doctrine, it is history, it is not faith. Prayer and worship are the paths of discipleship.

Kierkegaard puts it very well when he says that Christ came to call followers, not to cultivate admirers. Christ came into the world with the purpose of saving, not just instructing it. At the same time—as is implied in His saving work—he came to be the pattern, to leave footprints for the person who would join Him, who would become a follower. A follower strives to be what he or she admires. The simple admirer keeps
himself detached, he fails to see that what is admired has a claim on him. These admirers are not bad people; they simply want to follow Christ at a safe distance. They fail to see that Christ's life is a demand. Luke presents Nicodemus as the classic admirer of Christ. Fascinated by Jesus, but not ready to risk all and become a disciple.

From the first Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles, the Church presents itself in history as connected with the living Christ. Christ's followers did not disband after His death because the risen Christ made Himself present in their midst. Through the lives and testimony of those first disciples, so many of them martyrs, the Church communicates to us that God did not come down to earth for just one instant to be some kind of point in history, elusive to those born afterwards. God has come into our world to stay in the world: Christ is Emmanuel, "God with us."

**Passing on a Way of Life**

From this vantage, evangelization is the mission of the Church, which is itself an extension of Jesus Christ who is the Magister, the Teacher. He wants to communicate to us life in abundance. The mission of the Church is about making disciples, helping people respond to the call to holiness by being part of a faith-filled, worshipping community struggling to be faithful to the Gospel. Discipleship is about living with Christ, in a faith community striving to model our lives on His teaching and example and then to pass on the faith.

This is not something new in the history of the Church. We have been doing this for two thousand years. One of the first attempts is documented in a stunning book that comes to us from the first century. It is called the *Didache*, which means "training." It is the first training manual for initiating people into the life of the Church. It was memorized by the mentors or teachers who used it as a lesson plan, catechism, liturgical worship aide, and a primer for faithful discipleship. The *Didache* described the step-by-step transformation by which converts were to be prepared for a full active participation in the life of the Church. As [Aaron] Milavec says in his commentary on this remarkable document, "Any community that cannot artfully and effectively pass on its cherished way of life as a program for divine wisdom and graced existence cannot long endure. Any way of life that cannot be clearly specified, exhibited and differentiated from the alternative modes operative within the surrounding culture is doomed to growing insignificance and gradual assimilation."

The *Didache* shows us that for the Church teaching the faith is always a process of mentoring. Then as now we are not transmitting our own theories or notions but speaking and hopefully witnessing the word of God; the word of life is not to be received as mere information. The mentor was expected to illustrate, inquire, question, listen, and challenge his candidate in such ways that not only the words, but the deeper meanings of the way of life were being suitably assimilated at every step. The *Didache* also tries to prepare its novices for the rejection by their friends, relatives, and even by the dominant culture which is hostile to the Gospel teachings.
Another early writing that has always fascinated me is the *Letter to Diognetus* where the author is describing to his friend what Christians are like. He says that they live in the same neighborhoods, speak the same language, dress like everybody else; but they do not kill their babies and they respect the marriage bond. Very quaint indeed. It is a little scary to think that the Diognetus letter could have been written last week.

In today's world Catholic education must be *Didache*, training in a way of life which is increasingly alien in the secular world, where our concern about unborn children or the sacredness of marriage makes us appear quaint and even nettlesome. We need mentors: parents, grandparents, godparents, teachers, youth ministers, neighbors, who are ready to pass on the faith.

In our own country, American Catholics have worked arduously in our attempts to pass on the faith and to educate our young people to be good citizens of this country, the world and our eternal homeland. In the midst of present difficulties we tend to look back to a supposed golden age and often overlook the great challenges of the past.

When Boston was established as a diocese two centuries ago, the Pope was a virtual prisoner of Napoleon. Consequently Bishop Chevres' consecration was postponed for two years because the documents were unattainable. The Know-Nothings burnt down the Ursuline Convent and Catholic School and one of the first rectors of Boston College was tarred and feathered. In Boston, "them was the good old days."

The United States is a country of immigrants and we are an immigrant Church. Immigrants came fleeing religious persecution, political oppression, hunger, and misery. As the immigrants in [Frank and Malachy] McCourt's play about the Irish say, "We came to America because they told us the streets were paved in gold. When we got here, we discovered that the streets were not paved at all and we had to pave 'em."

The Catholic schools did so much to help the children of immigrants get a fine education. There was a great synergism between what was being taught in school and what Catholic parents were trying to impart at home. The spiritual formation and Catholic identity in the schools was promoted by the presence of an army of religious. To them we owe the greatest debt of gratitude for the existence of our Catholic schools and universities. Without the many sacrifices by generations of religious, especially Sisters, there would be no Catholic schools.

In 1950, the year I started at Catholic school, there were 84,000 nuns, 8,000 priests, and 3,500 brothers teaching in Catholic schools—almost 100,000 total. In our parish school we had about 50 or 60 students in each grade, some grades had double grades and we had morning sessions for half the students and afternoon sessions for the other half. All the kids in the parish went to the school and it was free. That particular school is still thriving and it is still free. Free because of the nuns in the past and still free because of the constant support of parishioners.
Today only about one-third of United States parishes have Catholic schools. These are doing an outstanding job educating our young, often from immigrant and minority groups. Our Catholic lay teachers have stepped into the breach and do us all proud. The majority of our young Catholics are in public schools, and many of them attend the parish religious education programs. By some estimates there are 350,000 teachers, mostly volunteers, teaching in those programs under very challenging circumstances. Our Catholic school teachers and catechists are our unsung heroes in the ongoing saga of the Didache in the third millennium. We need to help them be mentors and try to recapture the synergism between school, home, and parish.

**Adult Faith Formation**

The huge area where we are most deficient and which hampers our attempts to pass on the faith is that of *adult faith formation*. I believe we have much to learn from the apostolic movements, which have often had great success at communicating a deep spirituality to their members in the context of a close-knit community. The movements have often been able to energize their people to be evangelizers. I always shudder when I recall the words of Paul VI in *Evangelium Nunciandi*, "The evangelized person is an evangelizer." Our challenge in the new evangelization is to transform secularized Christians into apostles and inviter.

Our adult faith formation needs to reach out to three groups. First of all to our active parishioners, who are our volunteers, lay ministers, and committed Catholics. We need to help them have a deeper understanding of the faith and enjoy the richness of the Scriptures, the Catechism, the social encyclicals, the spiritual masters, medical ethics.

We also need outreach to the unchurched by having a good RCIA [the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults] program and teams that are ever finding new ways to invite people to consider joining the Church. Scripture apologetics and early Christian writers are important resources for our attempts to help new Catholics and prospective Catholics to discover the Church's treasures of faith.

The last group, the inactive Catholics, is the most difficult and here much reflection, prayer, and planning needs to take place on how to reach out to them. There are at least 17 million individuals in the United States who for reasons great and small have stormed off, dozed off, or simply fallen through the cracks. We have a responsibility to them. Christmas, Easter, weddings, and funerals are moments when inactive Catholics find themselves in Church. We must learn to make the most of these moments to welcome people home and put on the Church's best face. There needs to be discussion at the level of parish councils, diocesan pastoral councils, priest councils, as well as other groups in the Church concerning an appropriate way to reach out to inactive Catholics. We need to assume some responsibility for reaching out to these brothers and sisters who have stormed off or just drifted away.
Our belief must be in a God who so loved the world that He sent us His only son, Jesus Christ, to establish a people, a Church entrusted with His mission to make disciples of all nations and to build a civilization of love.

**The Gospel of Truth**

As a young priest, I was present at the Puebla Conference. It was Pope John Paul II’s first trip after being elected Pope. As the Pope's plane landed in Mexico City all the church bells in the country rang out with joy. The successor of Saint Peter was here in our midst. The crowd extended along the highway from Mexico City to Puebla. People had come the day before and slept on the highway. It reminded me of the Acts of the Apostles where Luke describes how the people put the sick by the side of the road so that Peter's shadow would touch them.

The crowd comprised of millions of Mexicans extended over the 60-mile highway connecting Mexico City and Puebla. The government had tried to discourage people from going. The word was "watch the Pope on television." Nobody paid any attention to that plea, but afterwards the government officials reported that there were no troublesome incidents due to the crowds as they had feared. Indeed the crime rate fell to an all time low while the Pope was in the country. The government speculated that even the burglars and pickpockets went for the Pope's blessing.

The Holy Father upon arriving in Puebla got out of the open car, walked across the soccer field to the makeshift altar and celebrated the opening Mass of the Puebla Conference. I shall never forget his homily. He challenged us to be teachers and to teach the truth about Christ, about the Church, about the human person.

The same message is as crucial to us today. The content of our teaching must embrace all these truths. The truth about Christ: The Son of the Father, true God and true man, our crucified redeemer, our risen Lord who has promised to be with us always and who establishes his Church on the rock of Peter.

The truth about the Church: Founded by Jesus on the Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, gathering God's people around the altar, calling people to discipleship, conversion, and ministry; a Church teaching with authority, witnessing to the presence of the risen Lord, serving Christ especially in the poor and downtrodden.

The truth about the human person: That each one is an irreplaceable mystery made in God's image and likeness called to an eternal destiny. The Church's teachings on human rights, Gospel of Life, sexual morality, and social justice are all corollaries of this great truth about our origins and our destiny.

The Church's medical ethics, service to the poor, sick and infirm, the works of mercy and social services, and the promotion of a more just society are all interconnected and crucial in our task of passing on the faith and building a civilization of love.
The Common Good

Our American culture celebrates individual freedom and autonomy often to the detriment of the common good. The hero of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, the brilliant, successful architect, Howard Roark, declares, "I come here to say that I am a man who does not exist for others." This is certainly in stark contrast to our concept of discipleship and being a man for others.

The celebration of the individual hero is a standard feature in such popular American genres as the Western film and the detective story. Lone cowboy heroes such as Shane or the Lone Ranger or Hopalong Cassidy came to the rescue of communities of helpless citizens unable to save themselves from evil criminals, and whether the detective is Sam Spade working out of a seedy San Francisco office or Jessica Fletcher sleuthing in the more wholesome atmosphere of Cabot Cove, the same formula is at play. Success and the triumph of good over evil are products of individual efforts. The role of social factors in contributing to individual success remains in the background. The American ideal of the rugged individual has given rise to the isolation and alienation that Robert Putnam documents in *Bowling Alone*, his sociological study of the growing individualism enshrined in our culture.

For all its positive aspects, American individualism that is unbridled and exaggerated becomes a liability. Alexis de Tocqueville, an early observer of our American ways, said, "Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart." Can people shut up in the solitude of their own hearts from a democratic society? Passing on the faith is an important contribution to our country. The culture that is born of our faith is a culture of interdependence, of solidarity, of sacrifice for the common good. "Greater love has no one than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends." Our task in the face of our modern American notion of exaggerated freedom and individualism is to build a new civilization of love, the alternative is that there will be no civilization at all.

In the past, the Church was persecuted and embattled for the assertions we make about God, Christ, the Trinity, the mystery of Grace, and interpretation of scripture or sacraments. Today the Church is attacked for what we teach about the human person.

The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man is lived out every day in our world. As a young priest, I was staying in a refugee camp during the civil war in El Salvador. The camp was full of children whose bellies were bloated by malnutrition. One day I asked a Sister working in the camp why they did not slaughter some of the cattle from a herd in a neighboring field to feed the families in the refugee camp. She explained to me that that would not be possible because those cattle were slated to be used for dog food for the United States. Too often human life is devalued by our contemporary culture—the most basic right to life is subordinated to the exaggerated entitlements of the autonomous self.

We believe that the human person should be the subject, but too often the human person is the object. The Church's teaching today on the human person made in God's image,
redeemed in Christ's blood, and called to a vocation of holiness must be the centerpiece of our social gospel.

Today our catechesis must joyfully and boldly proclaim these same truths about Christ, about the Church, about the human person. These truths are the content of our faith and are the truths that will set us free. Authentic freedom is based on truth and that freedom allows us to love. True freedom points us on the path to holiness and on the path to a civilization of love.

**Learning to be Disciples**

A year ago our Holy Father was in Madrid addressing one million young people. He told them, "Respond to the blind violence and inhuman hatred with the fascinating power of love." We all know that evil has its fascination and attraction, but too often we lose sight of the fact that love and goodness also have the power to attract and that virtue is winsome. Passing on the faith means helping people to have a real relationship with Christ that will equip them to lead a good life, a moral life, a just life. *Thus part of our job as teachers of the faith is to help our people become virtuous.* Plato thought that virtue was knowledge. As Chaim Ginott, the concentration camp survivor, reminds us, doctors, nurses, scientists, and soldiers were part of Holocaust machinery, showing that knowledge is not virtue, and often science and technology have been put at the service of evil.

Peter Kreeft has said that in our contemporary society we have reduced all virtue to one: being nice. Kreeft laments that for the first time in history moral relativism and subjectivism are not an aberration of rebels, but the reigning orthodoxy of the intellectual establishment. So often university academes and those in the media reject any belief in a universal and objective morality. And in our public schools, values clarification based on a moral ping pong of preferences and discussion serves up "values" that are often more about feelings and calculations rather than about truths and principles.

Stanley Hauerwas has said that learning to be moral is like learning to speak a language. You do not teach someone how to speak by first teaching that person the rules of grammar. The way most of us learn to speak a language is by listening to others speak and then imitating them. You learn to speak by being initiated into a community of language, by observing your elders, by mimicking those who speak well. Accordingly Hauerwas describes how the Church's task is to expose us to significant examples of Christian living. He describes how a group of confirmation program teachers discussed what was the goal of their program. Was it to help young people learn about the Church, about Jesus? Then someone said, "What we really want out of Confirmation is about a dozen youth who in their adult life come to resemble John Black." John Black was one of the faith filled and holy members of their congregation.

We need to equip our young people to be disciples. They need to know the truths of our faith, but they need to know how to live those truths. The way most of us become real Christians is by looking over someone else's shoulder, emulating some admired older
member of our family or parish, saying yes, and taking up a way of life that was made real and accessible through the witness of someone else. Young Christians need mentors, just as the Didache called for mentors to accompany the neophytes of the early Church.

We live in a world obsessed with celebrities. Celebrities have replaced heroes and heroines for our young people. Often times these celebrities, for all their good looks, talents in singing, acting, or sports, lead lives that are superficial, self-absorbed, and chaotic.

The Church has always held up for us the lives of our saints. The Holy Father has canonized so many in order to impress on us the universal call to holiness. The saints model for us the struggle to overcome human weakness and sinfulness and embrace God's will in our lives.

It is healthy for young people today to hear about our saints and contemporary heroes like Dorothy Day who, after having an abortion and another child out of wedlock, became one of the most outstanding persons in the history of the Church in our country.

Our young people want to see the ideals of the Gospel lived in our lives. One of the worse results of the current scandal in the Church can be a cynicism about the call to holiness in the Church. We run the risk of being overwhelmed by the bad example of priests and bishops and need to remind people that there have always been saints and sinners in the Church. The Church's task is to call everyone to conversion. We have our successes and our failures. The saints are the success stories our young people need to know. It helps them to see that we, their teachers, are struggling on the same path to holiness.

We must also break the bad habit of presenting the Church in such a way that people are deceived into thinking that they can be Christians and remain strangers. The privatization of religion in today's climate of new age individualism is poisonous to the Gospel message of community, of connectedness in the Body of Christ.

As a seminarian, I read an interview with Flannery O'Connor about growing up Catholic in the South. The famous author related how as a child she had a playmate, a little Baptist girl who was the closest of friends. She invited her friend to Mass one day. The little girl got permission from her mom and went with Flannery to church. Flannery couldn't wait to hear her friend's reaction. "Well, what do you think?" Flannery asked. Her little girlfriend said, "Wow, you Catholics really got something there. The music is so bad, the preaching is so boring, and all those people are there!"

Unfortunately, we can no longer count on 75 percent of the Catholic population fulfilling the Sunday Mass obligation. We must prepare people to be part of a worshipping community. Many years ago as bishop of the Virgin Islands, I was invited to visit the local synagogue by the rabbi. It is a beautiful West Indian building with white sand on the floor. It is over 300 years old. Walking around the synagogue I picked up an old Jewish prayer book and it happened to open to a beautiful prayer that begins with the
words, "More than Israel has kept the Sabbath, the Sabbath has keep Israel." I thought to myself, What a great truth that is, we Catholics can say the same thing: more than we have kept the Sunday Mass obligation, it has kept us a people, a church, focused on God, His word, and the mission He has entrusted to us.

In a culture addicted to entertainment, our young Catholics often find Sunday Mass a rather unsatisfying experience, like Flannery O'Connor's Baptist girlfriend. Our challenge is to be teachers of prayer. To help our young Catholics experience prayer so that when they gather for the Sunday Eucharist, they have a notion of why they are there and how to pray.

There can be no Catholic life, no holiness, no discipleship without prayer. Every Catholic school, every religious education program must have a prayer component that will help our young Catholics be part of a worshipping community. It is gathered around the altar that we recognize Christ in the breaking of the bread and where by partaking of the Eucharist we become one with Christ and with each other.

**Renewing Catholic Identity**

It is important for us to appreciate other faiths, but generic Christianity and comparative religion courses can have disastrous effects in our attempts to pass on the Catholic faith to new generations. Today's religious climate demands that we incorporate apologetics into our catechesis. Americans want to know "the why" of our teachings. In the past we have often been quick to present conclusions without showing how our doctrines fit together. In the highly personalized religious atmosphere of today many of our young people could say, "My karma ran over my dogma." But we are a people of the Book, of the Creed, and of the living Magisterium.

In his *Young Adult Catholics: Religion In the Culture of Choice*, Dean Hoge urges us to promote the distinctiveness of Catholic identity. I would concur and say that we need to stress the centrality to the Eucharist, the sacrament of confession as an experience of God's mercy and as a means of conversion and spiritual growth, Marian piety, and the importance of the universal ministry of Peter in the Papacy, our emphasis on community, and the social teaching of the Church. These things are uniquely Catholic, and understanding this helps bind young people to the Church.

Opportunities to bring our young people together in large numbers where they can witness to each other are also valuable exercises. It is always a joy to see our young Catholics at the Pro-life March in Washington. They are truly energized by the experience of faith and of the Gospel of Life in the company of thousands of their peers. Combined with a visit to the John Paul II Cultural Center and the Holocaust Museum, it can be a marvelous learning event for our young Catholics. We need to do things out of the classroom setting to give them a chance to see that what they learn about in class has repercussions in the way believers live and interact.
The Beauty That Saves

Andrew Greeley has said that “at every level Church leaders and teachers should realize that beauty (by which goodness and truth are present) is their strongest tool . . . for drawing the faithful closer to the Church and to the God for which the Church is a sacrament.”

Our challenge is to help our people glimpse the beauty of God, the beauty of the Gospel. The Holy Father in his Letter to Artists writes, “Beauty is a key to the mystery and a call to transcendence. It is an invitation to savor life and to dream of the future. That is why the beauty of created things can never fully satisfy. It stirs that hidden nostalgia for God which a lover of beauty like Saint Augustine could express in incomparable terms: ‘Late have I loved thee, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you!’”

It is that beauty that we want to help our people to experience. We must experience it ourselves in our own interior life. A teacher of the faith must first be a disciple to Christ, the Master, Teacher. We must love the Church. Jesus is the bridegroom, not the widower. He does not exist separate from His bride. I have always liked the ancient Christian text, the Shepherd of Hermas. It is a book of revelations granted to Hermas in Rome by agency of two heavenly figures, the first an old woman and the second an angel in the form of a shepherd.

The old woman represents the Church. In successive visions she becomes younger and more beautiful. As Hermas moves on the path of conversion, the vision of the Church’s beauty becomes more apparent to him. The path to holiness is a path to the source of all goodness and truth, of absolute beauty. The character, Prince Myshkin, in Dostoyevsky's The Idiot, puts it so well, “Beauty will save the world.”

We want to share with new generations what we have discovered: namely, that being a Catholic with a sense of personal vocation and a communal mission is a beautiful life. Our mission is about helping people catch a glimpse of the Beauty that saves and to have an appetite for that Beauty.

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