

Homily  
Catholic Schools Teachers Day – Votive of St. Joseph  
Oct. 21, 2021

“I have come to set the world on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” These words of our Lord are a perfect refrain for our gathering today. I’m so glad we are able to be together, and I want to welcome our teachers from throughout the diocese, as well as from the Diocese of Crookston, for this professional development day. As you know, we weren’t able to gather last year, so it’s especially good to see all of you here.

“I have come to set the world on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” Jesus is speaking to his disciples about his own mission, the launch of the Kingdom of God. He came not to keep things as they were, but to ignite and to purify, to begin something new and glorious. And with every parable, with every miracle, with every act of forgiveness, Jesus did set the world on fire, a fire that reached its climax at his cross and resurrection.

But, my friends, I would suggest to you that our Lord is still lighting a fire on this earth, and he’s doing it through you. In your life as a teacher, you touch the lives of many young people, you teach them and form them. Day after day, you can fan into flame a fire of learning and wisdom, a fire of virtue, and a fire of holiness. The work you do with these young people might seem ordinary to an outside observer, but what you are really doing is setting the world ablaze, one soul at a time. Every one of your students is a small fire that burns brightly, that can bring a little more light and warmth to a world that is often dark and cold. The love and faith and wisdom that you pass on to your students will go with them back to their families, and into the world. And one child at a time, our Lord is in fact setting the world on fire.

Today we’re also celebrating this Mass in honor of St. Joseph. All this year the Church has celebrated a Year of St. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, and the husband of Mary. Joseph was asked by God to be part of his unfolding plan of salvation by accepting Mary as his wife and Jesus as his Son. He became the protector and guardian of the Holy Family, what you might call the beginnings of the Church here on earth. And I think we can learn a lot from St. Joseph.

First of all, he was open to God’s Word and to his will. He heard the voice of the Lord, and that couldn’t have happened if he were not a man of prayer. He teaches us all the importance of prayer and meditation. The most enduring image we probably have of Joseph is at the birth of Jesus. There he is, standing over the child Jesus in the manger, silent and filled with wonder. Just as Joseph gazed on Jesus with love, so should we. Luke tells us that Mary pondered all these things, but I’m sure Joseph did some pondering too. As teachers, we too must gaze on the face of Jesus and allow him to speak to our hearts so that we can pass along the Good News of salvation to our students by the witness of our lives.

Joseph was also a man of compassion. He could have turned his back on Mary, but instead he had pity and took her into his home. Joseph teaches us the virtue of compassion and charity, the selfless love that moved him to say yes to our Lord. His compassion made it possible for Jesus to enter into our human family and to be our Savior. And if we live that compassion every day, then our students will learn it and bring it with them wherever they go. The love of God burned brightly in Joseph, and that same love will set the world ablaze if we do our part.

Joseph was also a man of quiet courage. He says not a word in the Scriptures, but his actions are strong and resolute. It took courage to defy the conventions of his time and accept Mary as his wife. He faced danger when King Herod sought to kill the child Jesus, and a lesser man might have run the other way. But Joseph courageously stayed the course, and he was willing to even go into exile to protect his little family. We too are called to courage and fortitude, a willingness to make sacrifices for others, for our

students and our co-workers. Your readiness to stand for truth and goodness today will echo in the lives of your students for years to come, and will ignite a fire of holiness throughout the earth.

There are many other ways that Joseph is a great patron for us, but more than anything else, he simply put his trust in God and accepted the gift of his grace. Joseph couldn't know everything that would transpire when he said yes to the angel's call, but he had faith, and he believed. That is what God asks of us too, that we will believe and share what we have been given with our students. Our Lord is even now lighting a fire on earth, and he's doing it in every one of our schools, in every classroom, in every youngster that you teach, one soul at a time.