

**Homily for Mass on the Occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
Catholic Education at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish**

**April 28, 2019  
Second Sunday of Easter  
Divine Mercy Sunday**

**Saint Anthony of Padua Parish  
Effingham, Illinois**

**†Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki  
Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, faculty and staff of Saint Anthony High School and Elementary Schools, students, parents, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good that we are here on this Second Sunday of Easter, Divine Mercy Sunday, to offer thanks to our Lord in celebration of the one hundred and fifty years of Catholic Education that so many students have received here at Saint Anthony Parish. Your parish's schools serve not only as beacons of light and love educating future members of our society, but moreover, they are forming true disciples of our risen Lord.

On an anniversary such as this, it is natural to wonder what life was like one hundred and fifty years ago. Standing here today in the year 2019, the differences in our country and world, as well as our way of life, seem vast.

In 1869 both Andrew Johnson and, later, Ulysses S. Grant, served as President of these United States; the “golden spike” was driven marking the completion of the first transcontinental railroad; Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed the National Woman Suffrage Association; the Cincinnati Red Stockings opened the baseball season as the first fully professional team; the First Vatican Council opened in Rome; Southern Illinois University Carbondale was founded; and here in Effingham, Illinois, Franciscan Sisters from Joliet moved to Effingham and taught for two years in a six-room schoolhouse. Later, in 1874, the School Sisters of Notre Dame arrived to lead the education and religious formation for the youth of Saint Anthony Parish and remained dedicated to this mission for the next 133 years.

Over the course of the years that followed the founding of that initial six-room school, it grew and changed to become the two schools that we know today. While not all of the changes were always easy, they did help this community to strive to follow the will of our Lord more closely in their lives and to live as true disciples of Our Lord. This, my dear brothers and sisters, is the crux of what we are about as a Catholic community and is the

center of the mission of Catholic education: the formation of young people into true disciples of Jesus Christ.

In an address to Catholic educators during his 2008 Apostolic Visit to the United States, Pope Benedict XVI spoke to this, saying:

Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the Good News. First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth. This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good, and true; a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the Church.<sup>1</sup>

Since 1869, the consecrated religious and lay educators of St. Anthony Grade School and High School have embraced this charism and have developed their students not only to be lifelong learners but to also lead lives of service and true discipleship.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, during this Easter Season it is important for us to reflect on the reality that God gave us the greatest gift that could possibly be given, that of Jesus' life and ministry as well as His death and resurrection, in order that we might have eternal life. This must

cause us to realize that if God did that out of love for us, then we are called in turn to give our lives back to God through living lives of true discipleship. Like the first disciples of our Lord, we must strive to find our happiness and fulfillment in following the call of the Lord in our lives and in turn help others to live in such a way as to bear witness to the love of God, especially in forming the youth of Saint Anthony Parish in their lives of faith.

The message of Saint John Paul II, when he addressed the young people of the Church who had gathered for World Youth Day in the Jubilee Year 2000, rings true in our lives today:

It is Jesus you seek when you dream of happiness; He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; He is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is He who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is He who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is He who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.

It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.<sup>2</sup>

So, as we celebrate the work that has been done to form faith-filled young Catholic disciples over the past 150 years here at Saint Anthony Parish, let us renew our commitment to the formation of true Christian disciples. May we ever seek to follow the way of Jesus over that of the world and in doing so improve ourselves and our society so that we might bear witness to our Lord in all that we say and do.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting with Catholic Educators, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Conference Hall of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Thursday, 17 April 2008.

<sup>2</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> World Youth Day, Address of the Holy Father John Paul II, Vigil of Prayer, Tor Vergata, Saturday, 19 August 2000.