

HOMILY – CATHOLIC EDUCATION SUNDAY – 28 JANUARY 2018

One hundred years ago, at this time 1918, the Scottish Bishops handed virtually all the Catholic Schools to the state, land, buildings, staff, chalkboards, the lot. In return, the Scottish Government agreed to finance Catholic education where the Catholic population justified it.

This is quite an unusual deal in terms of Catholic schools, the same arrangement does not exist in many other countries. So, what is the difference about a Catholic faith school as opposed to a non-denominational school? Firstly, the ethos of the school should be based on Catholic doctrine, values, traditions and beliefs. Secondly, the Head Teacher has to be approved by the Church. Thirdly, the R.E. curriculum is tailored for Catholic education.

Perhaps many of you were educated at St Nicholas Primary School, Holy Family Primary school, Our Lady's High in Broxburn or St Mary's in Bathgate. Hopefully you can remember some of your teachers, the ones that you were scared of and the ones you really enjoyed. Sadly, over the years, schools have closed but conversely, in other areas, new ones have opened.

The key principle for Catholic faith and Catholic education is that the children should be formed in the knowledge of their faith by their parents, the primary school and by the parish.

One of the negative effects, I believe, of the Vatican II is that the Pocket/Penny Catechism was removed and for the next thirty years there was no core text for teaching and passing on the Catholic faith. Also, in that time, Catholics in many families apostasised or reneged on their coming regularly to Sunday Mass. Many parents took the minimum approach and thought they were doing enough, just by sending their child to a Catholic school. Even priests, dare I say, opted out of their responsibilities regarding the Sacraments, by leaving all the instruction to the Primary School teachers. In the subsequent years, teachers, in some cases, became lapsed themselves and so the core passion and zeal for the Faith has been diluted and diminished.

One of the first instructions Jesus gave to his Apostles was, "Go Teach All Nations", in other words, pass on all that I have taught you in parables, sermons and moments of Grace.

There is a real danger that if the core school role in our Catholic schools and that staff as well, do not remain deeply committed to their faith, then we are assisting in the disenfranchise of Catholic Education provided by the State.

Let me give you a couple of examples. Recently the Catholic School in Selkirk had twenty-seven pupils of which only two were Catholic. Of the school staff, only the classroom auxiliary was Catholic. In Livingston, I was Chaplain to St John Ogilvie's School, of about three hundred pupils. Fifty per cent were not baptized Catholic. Of the fifty per cent who were, ie one hundred and fifty children, only about thirty were coming regularly to Mass. Thirty out of three hundred, means ten per cent. So, the question can arise, why should the State provide a faith school for a community where only ten per cent of the children are celebrating their faith?

So, in a sense, we have a battle on our hands to save our marvelous Catholic schools. Yes, in a way, we are victims of our own success, that so many non-Catholics, even Muslims, want to send their children to a Catholic school. But, those who are nominally Catholic, are in the majority of cases, not practicing

their religion by coming to Mass on a Sunday. Even some of the Catholic teachers confess they are not regular Mass attenders, so the justification is weakened.

Archbishop Tartaglia has written a passionate letter promoting Catholic Education, with the slogan, "Catholic Schools – Good for Scotland", but he also acknowledges that they are vulnerable and so he encourages us all to speak out positively on behalf of Catholic Education. To defend our schools, we must also strengthen our Faith and in the Spirit of the New Curriculum for R.E., to know more and more about the person of Jesus and the teachings of the Gospel. I pray that, one day, R.E. will be a compulsory exam at S3, in High School and more young people will step forward to supplement many of the excellent Catholic teachers who teach in our schools. In India, children, from age 5 to 15, do two hours Catechism on a Sunday!

Let us pray for our schools today, support them, encourage them and many they also encourage the parishes and the parents in the missionary life of the Church. The Church needs Catholic schools just as the Catholic schools need the Church.

Amen