

Reflection on the Virtue of Zeal – May 14, 19

Michael Kelleher – Interim Principal

St. Edward- Epiphany School is one big ball of zeal. It's what makes this school amazing! It's why this school, more than most Catholic schools, is almost completely full... It's because new parents and students say to themselves, "you know what?... I want what those people have. I'm going to send my child to St. Ed's."

Before I bring us back to talk about St. Ed's... I'd like to take us on a journey to the other side of the world... to Japan. I had a chance to spend 2 weeks in Japan and it changed my life and strengthened my faith in Christ ever since. In case you don't know much about Japan, in addition to anime cartoons, Samurai warriors and Ninjas, sushi, and the bullet train, they love TEA... The drink. They drink Green Tea most afternoons. In most places in Japan they have women – named Geisha – specifically trained to serve tea. Geisha are these beautiful waitresses with porcelain faced make-up, and kimonos. I have a picture here of one. They work in tea houses and everything they do to serve tea is as close to perfection as humanly possible. The way they move to reach for a cup or how they present the tea or the decorations in the tea house are so precise. They basically spend their entire lives perfecting the art of serving tea.

So, I had the opportunity to visit one of these tea houses, and when the Geisha brought me the tea, I was seated facing a beautiful garden that had only one purple hydrangea flower in it. Then I looked down on my tray and saw a purple lump of sugar shaped exactly like the hydrangea. I thought, "my goodness, these people have thought of everything. And this geisha... she has spent her entire life perfecting the art of serving... Tea...What's so great about Tea?!?"

So, as I started to drink the tea, I found myself really overwhelmed with emotion. I actually started to cry in my tea cup. I thought to myself, 'Why is it that no one in the Western Hemisphere works this hard on anything? Something as simple as tea is so beautiful!, I wish I could be a part of something this beautiful...' And that's when it hit me..., 'Wait, I am part of something this beautiful. The body and blood of Christ! When the priest spends his whole life perfecting the act of taking bread and wine and making it in to the Body and Blood of Christ, that is so beautiful! It transforms lives! And, instead of it just being tea, it's Jesus!' It was at that moment that I really fell in love with the Mass, the liturgy, and the Eucharist. It was the quiet zeal of the Geisha in how they served tea, that deepened my faith in Christ. It was an understanding that a priest who works to live a holy life can set people's hearts on fire with love of Jesus!

So, what is zeal? Being driven by an intense love for God.

Zeal... If you have a favorite sports team and you wear their football, basketball, or hockey jersey, that is zeal. You are willing to share with others the message that you are supporting this team. That's a very basic understanding. And some of you look forward to wearing your SEES sports gear around your neighborhood because you are proud of the school you attend....that's a form of zeal too.

Zeal... It's everywhere in the school.... Especially in your teachers!... It's in the shaved head of a 5th grade teacher, Mr. Maher, who donates money to the Children's Hospital. It's in the assistant principal, Mr. Andrew, who loves this school so much he lives next door to it and goes to almost every sports event possible. It's in the 4th grade teacher, Mrs. Long, who despite ups and downs of dealing with different

principals, her message that SEES is a wonderful school has been the same for 29 years. It's Mrs. Winder, who seems to be everywhere, all the time, helping out in PreK, or E-3, or with the 8th grade dance, or at the Art and Music night. It's in Mrs. Gullidge, whose years of teaching as a silent professional have led students to a deeper sense of justice. I know I will get in trouble for naming some teachers and not everyone, but seriously... ladies and gentlemen, look around, these teachers are so full of zeal... they believe in this community, they believe in Christ, and they believe in you.

But, the Virtue of Zeal, as we will see from a Virtues in Practice perspective, is directed specifically at spreading the Good News of Jesus. We are blessed to live in a country that allows us to believe what we want... but that might also be to our detriment as well... because it allows us to not have to sacrifice our comfort or safety in order to practice our faith. We don't have to be perfect to sit in Mass.

But, if you are looking for someone with zeal, who is the person who loves their faith... the person who wants to learn more about Jesus... the person who doesn't complain about going to church.... The person who isn't afraid to stand up and say either in their words or their actions, I love Jesus!

Folks, yes, I love Jesus! And, I also love Christ in the Eucharist. And I love the ministry of Catholic Schools.

I can't imagine my life without Catholic schools... Because without Catholic Schools (and in my own case my upbringing at St. Bridget School) I would likely have been forced to find meaning and explanations for Christianity on my own... or possibly... sadly... not at all. And where would I have been taught to pray, or where would I have been taught to serve, or where would I have been shown that a Life of Virtue is a roadmap for life filled with faith, hope, and love.

So, I'd like to offer my words of encouragement to the 2nd grade students who will celebrate their first communion with us. The 4th graders will give rosaries to the 2nd graders that they made with love as a gift. No other type of school except a Catholic School would offer you the opportunity to celebrate your 1st communion with everyone.

And, I'd like to congratulate one of our students, Jack Medlin, who is literally standing up to profess his faith and to become fully initiated in to the Catholic Church today. Jack, you are an inspiration to all of us. Thank you for your zeal! So, as you look around for a student in your own class to nominate, think of the person who really puts their faith in God first. The person who loves Jesus.... Maybe not so much in words, but in kind and precise actions that lead other people to know that Jesus is alive in our hearts. Who among you is driven by an intense love for God?