

Rare is the rich man who feels a great passion to give all he has to care for others. In Jesus, we have our model who emptied himself on the cross that we might share in the riches of eternal life. Another model is Saint Joseph Calasanz. “A priest with university training in canon law and theology, respected for his wisdom and administrative expertise, he put aside his career because he was deeply concerned with the need for education of poor children.”<sup>i</sup>

400 years ago, when society had not yet recognized the value of public education, schools were generally for the rich and privileged. Father Joseph lobbied schools in Rome to undertake the mission of educating those who did not have means to pay for school. Unable to rally support for this expansive vision, Joseph and several companions took it upon themselves to teach deprived children at their own expense.

Parents deeply appreciated education for their children and there was a great demand to expand the school. “Soon, Pope Clement VIII gave support to the school, and this aid continued under Pope Paul V. Other schools were opened; other men were attracted to the work, and in 1621 the men were recognized as a religious community, the Clerks Regular of Religious Schools... Not long after, Joseph was appointed superior for life.”<sup>ii</sup> Fr Joseph understood that dedicated teachers were critical to the mission. “Surely a task to be carried out with the greatest care, must be endowed with overflowing charity, inexhaustible patience, and, above all, profound humility.”<sup>iii</sup>

Fr. Joseph saw education as a ministry to help build the kingdom of God. In a letter to a religious superior, he wrote:

Everybody realizes the great dignity and merit of that ministry in which men devote themselves to the education of boys, especially poor boys, so that they may learn the way to eternal life. When, in the interests of soul and body, knowledge is imparted, piety cultivated, Christian doctrine inculcated, their teachers share in a certain manner in the work of their guardian angels. Help of the most excellent kind is given to young people, whatever their origin or station, so that not only are they preserved from evil but they are more easily and gently drawn towards good.<sup>iv</sup>

Fr. Joseph saw the lives of the young transformed and realized it was so much easier to mold a child through virtue than try to reform a child who had been toughened by the hard knocks of life. Seeing and nurturing the human dignity of each child through education did more than just offer school to the poor. Parents were better equipped to raise their children, the young became productive members of society as they matured, and the Church empowered the laity to build the Kingdom of God more effectively.

Fr Joseph encountered many obstacles. Some felt it was a waste of time and money to educate the poor. He faced fierce opposition and was repeatedly investigated by papal commissions. Joseph was demoted and saw his vision to educate the poor suppressed for a time.

Love motivated his work and that also meant carrying the cross of suffering. Faithful to the end, Joseph served Christ and the church as he educated the poor. “Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me” (Mt 18:4-5).

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<sup>i</sup> [franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-joseph-calasanz](http://franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-joseph-calasanz)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> From Office of Readings