

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

*Reflections on Religious Education*

Our Sunday Readings are Deut. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 7:32-35; Mark 1:21-28; and our Song of Praise is Psalm 95. This is the beginning of Catholic Schools Week, hence this theme for this Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, January 31, 2021.

To be educated religiously is truly a blessing. Unfortunately, not every person receives such privilege. Not to be educated in the ways of faith in God is itself evil. Those who have received religious education must give thanks to God, thanks to their parents, thanks to their teachers, and thanks to the institutions and those whose combined efforts made their education possible. Sometimes we take many things for granted, including the fact that the privileges we enjoy, that some people staked out their necks in debate and planning to provide them. Many others long to receive the privilege and opportunity we have but have not gotten them. Think of some of your opportunities. Think of what lives would have been for you without them. Have you been thankful and appreciative enough?

What is Religious Education? This is the transmission of faith, beliefs and traditions one receives in the home, Church, schools and colleges in the course of training in life, both formal and informal. One may also ask: what is Catholic Education? In the same way, as a result of attending Catholic schools, catechism and CCE classes in preparation for the sacraments, one receives training in the doctrines, faith beliefs, and the traditions of the Catholic Faith and practices. These would not be possible if one did not grow up in the Catholic family, Catholic environment or did not attend a Catholic school. "Catholic education is a key way we transmit our faith, beliefs, and traditions onto the next generation." (Pastoral Patterns, page 48). What have you done with your Catholic education? OR, what are you doing with your Catholic education?

In every generation, God blesses us with many leaders who bring God's word to the people. In our first Reading (Deut. 18:15-20) Moses promised his people that God would raise up a prophet among them who would speak God's words. We interpret that message to be our Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke words with authority and the power to drive out unclean spirits in the synagogues, (cf. Mk. 1:21-28). When we gather to worship as believers, do we also enter with that kind of expectation, so that the power of the word of God would transform us? Saint Paul was also called by God to preach to the Gentiles of his time, (cf. 1 Cor. 7:32-35). The psalmist calls on us to open up and not harden our hearts as we listen to the voice of the Lord in the proclaimed and preached word we hear, (cf. Ps 95). We ought to have virgin hearts and be anxious about the things of the Lord, that we may be holy to the Lord.

Naming something or someone has a somewhat controlling effect, ownership effect – do you know that? The unclean spirit tried it on Jesus, that he knew him as the Holy One of God. Jesus in re-action rebuked it sharply and drives it out, (cf. Mk. 1:24-26). That incident happened in the synagogue. In the same way, Jesus drives out and expels the demons in our lives, if we allow him to, if we surrender totally to the Lord. That is what conversion, repentance and prayer do in our lives. Some of us are carrying the devil on our backs although they still come to church, of course. Some of us give the demons comfort zones in our lives. They cannot accept corrections, cannot allow anyone to convince them of wrong. We cannot dance well with the devil on our back; taken from the Lord of the Dance song. Yet we cannot see that such attitude ruins our relationships, families, and employments. As a result, we cannot keep a job for a long time without quitting or being laid off; cannot stay long in marriage or friendship; cannot persevere in

group ministry with others or even in a religious Congregation of Nuns or Priests. But being prayerful and obedient to authorities, parents and family would drive out the demons in our lives, and lead to proper and guided discernment. Faithfulness to religious education would yield Spirit-filled results at the end to benefit both the individual and the Church of God.