

May 6, 2018 11:00 a.m.

St. Rose of Lima, Hastings

Sixth Sunday of Easter/100th Anniversary of St. Rose of Lima School

On this Sixth Sunday of Easter, in these early days of the beautiful month of May, we continue rejoicing in the Good News of Easter Joy! And today's celebration of the 100th Anniversary of St. Rose of Lima School is another reason to rejoice and to repeat our Easter "Alleluia"s!

This great parish of St. Rose of Lima has been a gathering place for Catholics for almost 150 years, first starting out by worshipping in one another's homes, then in the original church, and then followed by this grand church whose 100th anniversary many of us gathered to celebrate just 3 years ago. But the Parish needed a School to help educate the children of this community, and thanks to the persistence and sacrifice of many of your ancestors, the priests at that time, and the good Sisters of St. Joseph, the first St. Rose School opened 100 years ago this school year.

During this special Mass, we give thanks to God for those courageous and generous people 100 years ago, and for all the courageous and generous priests and people of this parish it has taken throughout these 100 years who have sustained this School for all these generations, including this current generation. Over the course of these 100 years, the School has been enlarged, old portions torn down, new additions added on; for a period of time, this School went all the way to 12th grade; and now in more recent days, this School continues its mission from Pre School thru 6th Grade, with a relatively new After-School Daycare program as well.

The most important mission of any Catholic School, of course, is to be a resource of the Parish to help to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to assist parents in passing on the Faith from one generation to the next. In that regard, St. Rose School has been faithful to that mission consistently over these many generations. But over and above that primary mission, St. Rose School has always provided an excellent academic program, fostered a strong connection with the local Community, and has consistently helped to prepare the students of St. Rose School to be good citizens, productive members of society, and, we hope, faithful, practicing Catholics.

If we would try today to summarize the one basic and primary message that St. Rose School has been communicating over these 100 years, and should

continue to communicate, it might very well be the lesson Jesus was teaching to His Apostles in the Gospel passage we heard just a couple minutes ago. This “teaching lesson” was part of Jesus’ final instructions to His Apostles at the Last Supper, the night before Jesus’ suffering, death and burial. So, these words would have been among the most important that Jesus wanted to communicate and uppermost in His mind and heart. And just as any good Catholic School Teacher knows, one of the best teaching methods is “repetition”; as the ancient Latin proverb tells us: “Repetition is the mother of all learning”. The teacher will teach the same point once, twice, three times, and then find other ways to say the same thing, and eventually, he/she hopes, the student might have that “proverbial lightbulb” turn on, and say, Now I see!

Jesus, being an excellent Rabbi, repeats over and over again that His Apostles must Love one another. In those 8 brief verses of the Gospel passage we listened to, Jesus used the word “Love” 9 times in one form or another. *“As the Father has loved me, so I also love you; remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love.”*

In fact, St. John, who was a student of Jesus the Master, used the very same technique in the very brief passage we heard this morning in the Second Reading from his first Letter; in just 3 verses, John used the word “Love” 9 times as well.

When Jesus had been asked to sum up all the Commandments of the Old Law and all the teaching of the Prophets to determine which one was the greatest, He gave us the Great Commandment: *“To love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves”*. And so, I think it’s safe to conclude that the most important message that our Loving Father wants us to know, and that Jesus desperately wanted His Apostles to remember, especially during those next challenging days of His crucifixion, death and burial, is: ***“WE ARE LOVED!”***

Jesus urges us, multiple times in this section of St. John’s Gospel, to *“remain in His love”*, in the same way that He *“remains”* connected to and united with His Father. The way that Jesus tells us we will be able to *“remain”* united with Him is *“if we keep His commandments”*. Jesus goes on to tell us WHY He wants us to *“remain in His Love”*, and why He wants us to *“keep His commandments”*-----and here is His reason: *“I have told you this so that My joy may be in you, and your joy might be complete.”* That is Jesus’ goal---that is what He wants for us----for us to

be JOY-full. So, perhaps today would be a good time to ask yourself: How filled with Jesus' Joy are you?

Perhaps before we can answer that question, we should ask another question first: what is Joy? There are times when we might interchange the word "joy" for the word "happiness"---but actually if we check the definitions, we see clearly that they are two separate emotions.

Jesus' definition of Joy, which is based on how He lived His life in this world, could be put this way: "Joy is fulfilling our purpose in life, doing what we have been called to do, and doing it faithfully and with Love!"

So, in light of that definition, I wonder: how Joy-full are we? Are we trying to be faithful to God's Will? Are we trying to do what is right amidst all the pressures that are exerted to try to keep us from doing so? Are we willing to love one another as Jesus loves us, and even lay down our lives for others in love? Are we living the normal circumstances of our lives with the same Love as Jesus had for us, and to the very best of our ability?

Last week, I had the opportunity to be back in Pittsburgh for a few days celebrating a number of Sacrament events within my extended Family, including getting to meet my newest great nephew, Luca, who had been born in early March, and to have the privilege of Baptizing him a week ago yesterday. I got to hold him for quite a while before the Baptism, and I have to say, that is pure joy---to hold and gaze at a new-born child! But it was better to see the genuine Joy in the eyes of my niece, Luca's mother, as well as his father ---to watch them give themselves completely, totally, willingly and generously to care for every need of their child---to see the Joy that child brings them---to see Love lived 24/7, not just talked about on a Sunday in a Homily. That is Joy.

And that is the very same Joy that we can see in the eyes of every parent of every child, whether they're 2 months old, 2 years old, or 22 years old. Parental Love and Spousal Love are the two closest human comparisons to the Love that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit experience within their Trinity of Persons, and the meaning of the Love that Jesus keeps trying to teach us about: to love God with all our strength and ability, and to love one another as He loves us.

Just as that's the most important part of the Gospel that the Church needs to preach to all people, so too is that the most important part of the mission of every Catholic School. To help our Students to understand, and live, that kind of

Gospel Love, and to help them to share that kind of Love in every part of their lives.

Even in these days when we live in the midst of divisiveness, anger, and rude/hurtful speech, both directly between people, and in our social media, our Catholic Schools need to be teaching respect, civility, and understanding.

In the midst of so much violence in the world around us, and with increased incidences of racial prejudice and selfish advancement, our Catholic Schools need to be teaching what we heard in today's First Reading from St. Peter, that *"God shows no partiality; rather....whoever loves God and acts uprightly is acceptable to Him."*

In spite of the fact that in so many other places, we are being taught to be "out for # 1" and to "get to the top" no matter at what or whose expense, our Catholic Schools must teach what it means to be a Disciple of Jesus: *to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow each day in Jesus' footsteps."*

Our Baptism has brought us into a relationship with Jesus Christ and with all the other members of the Body of Christ, and we all share a life-time mission: to live a life of holiness. As you know, Pope Francis just wrote the whole Church a beautiful Letter entitled *"Gaudete et Exsultate" / "Rejoice and Be Glad"* and it's all about the universal Call to holiness. In that Letter, Pope Francis reminds us: *"The Lord wants us all to be saints, and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence."* (#1)

He goes on to say: *"To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious....We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness (to God's love) in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves."* (#14) That doesn't happen overnight; in fact, it's a life-time process. But it's a process whose foundation is laid well in a good Catholic School.

Today we rejoice in the fact that St. Rose Catholic School has been providing the foundation for a life of holiness for the thousands and thousands of young women and men who have been formed and educated here for the past 100 years.

And so, on this special anniversary day in the midst of this Joyful Easter Season, what do you think would be the best way that we can express our gratitude to all those who have made this School possible for 100 years?

Obviously Jesus has told us the answer, and He has repeated it over and over and over again. So, how do we say “thank you”? ***“To love one another as Jesus loves us”***. God bless you!