

Catholic Schools Week

Ave Maria Catholic Church. Sunday, January 28, 2024. Fr. David M Vidal

We are celebrating Catholic Schools Week. Today, our parish school, *Donahue Academy*, with its students, teachers, and administrators, participates in this Sunday liturgy. They come to thank God for the gift of Catholic education and to share their blessings with all parishioners.

Dr. Snyder, the parish school principal, will take a few minutes at the end of Mass to talk about the school and its needs, for which we will have a second collection. In this context, I would like to reflect on the importance of Catholic education.

In their book *“Get Out Now,”* Mary Rice Hasson and Theresa Farnan write: *“It’s time for an honest conversation about why we are losing our kids. Why are the children of patriotic Americans ready to believe the worst about their country? Why are the sons and daughters of committed believers becoming moral relativists and “nones”? Why are the children of well-grounded adults growing up unsure of “who they are” in the most basic sense—whether they are male or female—even as they embrace the mandates of identity politics?”*

The authors tell us that no one wants to discuss the cause of this crisis. It is the “elephant in the room.” It is a crisis that leads us to a simple question: What education are your children receiving?

A wise man, the philosopher Plato, explained that what is learned from childhood becomes part of nature, (*The Republic*, Bk 2, 395d). For this reason, parents, who have the sacred responsibility of educating their children, must know what kind and quality of education their children are receiving.

What do we teach in a Catholic Institution?

First, we teach your children to respect nature.

If a child comes and tells us: *“I want to be a tree.”* We say: *“You are not a tree, and you cannot be a tree.”* If the child comes afterward and tells us: *“I want to be an airplane.”* We say: *“You cannot be an airplane, and if you try, it will be painful.”* In other words, we teach children to respect and love God’s given gifts in them. We teach children to love God’s beautiful plan for them. We do not invent nature; we admire it because, in the intelligent and beautiful design of nature, we discover the love of our Creator.

Second, we teach your children to respect you as parents.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches: *“Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule,”* (n. 2223). The *Catholic Church*, through our parish school and the parish catechetical program, partners with parents; however, we never take their place.

We do not hold things back from parents. And we always highlight the parents' central role in the education of their children. We support parents in their mission of raising their children.

Third, we also teach your children to respect the land where they were born and the country to which they belong.

As Catholics, we cherish civic virtues, and patriotism is a virtue, not a vice. We must learn from the Venerable Fulton Sheen. He teaches: *“The treatise on Patriotism in the writings of the greatest philosopher of all times, St. Thomas Aquinas, is to be found under the subject of “Piety.” This, at first, may strike as strange to those who think of piety as pertaining only to the love of God. But once it is remembered that love of neighbor is inseparable from love of God, it is seen that love of our fellow citizens is a form of piety.”*

Patriotism is pious love for the country in which we were born and the society in which we were raised or by which we were adopted. For this reason, we foster a respectful study of the history of our country, and we teach the values of the American society, which was built with the recognition of the sacredness of the human person.

Finally, we teach your children to love God.

Let us listen again to the Venerable Fulton Sheen. He writes: *“If the essence of Americanism is the sacredness of human personality as created by God, who is doing most to preserve that Americanism? The schools that never mention God’s name? . . . Democracy relies on freedom and liberty. But freedom and liberty are inseparable from responsibility, and responsibility is inseparable from conscience, and conscience is inseparable from religion (and religion is inseparable from God).”*

Our Catholic school teaches children the story of God’s love for us. We tell them that God the Father loved us so much that He sent Jesus. We tell them that God chose Mary to be the Mother of the Redeemer, the Mother of God. We teach them that Jesus founded the Church on Peter and the Apostles, the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. However, we do not only teach about Jesus; we also bring your children closer to Christ through daily Mass, Holy Communion, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Donahue Academy is not only a Catholic school in the Diocese of Venice but also our parish school. That means Donahue Academy has as a priority to assist Ave Maria Parish families in their children's education. And if your children are still on a waiting list, it is not because your family is not a priority; it is just because we must build new rooms to accommodate them.

We must treasure the value of Catholic education, and we are grateful for your support of our parish school.