

Ephphatha – *Be Opened*

Prayer Service for Educators of Students With Special Needs

Virtue Link: Faith, Hope, Love, Justice, Prudence, Fortitude

Catholic Character Themes: Community, Compassion, Discipleship, Reverence, Solidarity, Stewardship

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning/afternoon, and welcome to our workshop for teaching students with special needs. As we begin our day, it is only fitting that we set our minds and hearts on Jesus and his Good News in prayer. It is Jesus, so often referred to as *teacher* in the Gospels, who models for us how we are to educate in the light of faith. It is Jesus who calls us through baptism to be co-workers in his labours for the Kingdom of his Father. It is Jesus who tells us *I am the way*, and invites us to be his hands, feet, ears and heart by our guiding, accompanying, listening and comforting presence in the lives of those entrusted to our care. It is Jesus, who enjoins us to pray, saying *ask, and it shall be given, knock and the door shall be opened*.

Let us begin our prayer then, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER:

God our Father, you sent your Son Jesus to spread the Good News of your Kingdom: a Kingdom of justice, peace and love. He opened the ears of those who longed to hear, the eyes of those who longed to see, the hearts and minds of those who longed for the freedom to love and understand. Grant that your Holy Spirit might inspire our reflections this day. May our work today help bring forth a greater understanding and commitment to the needs of those we are called to serve. We make this prayer to you in Jesus' name.

Amen.

READING: (Mark 7, 31-37)

A reading from the Gospel according to Mark.

Jesus returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is "Be opened." And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

(Pause)

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION:

Inclusivity

The work of Catholic Education is always linked to inclusivity. Our Catholic Schools have practised inclusivity throughout their history. We have worked diligently to include the laity in the family of the Church. We include the destitute in the family of caring, the ignorant in the family of learning, the sick in the family of healing. We desire to teach all the children that pass through our doors that they are not forgotten, that they are not

expunged from the communal memory of our people or purged from the communal register of our hearts.

In this instance, Catholic education strives to hear the human cry to belong. Today that cry has not fundamentally changed, save for the fact that it has grown louder and more anguished. The answer of Catholic schools is to shatter a world of exclusivity with an inclusive presence. It is an incredibly easy thing to state who does not belong: the AIDS sufferer, the single parent, the illiterate, the learning disabled, or even youth in general. The spirit and spirituality of Catholic Education does not merely acknowledge that the world includes these people and many more like them. It insists that they be included in our world of grace and presence.

Canadian Catholic Schools Trustees' Association, *Build Bethlehem Everywhere*, Pp. 41-42.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let us pray for the Church, that all Christians might recognize in the disabled and struggling children among us the face of Jesus, and open their hearts and communities their needs. We pray to the Lord...

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for the world, that all God's children will learn to see past appearances and labels to put first the welfare of the poor, the sick and all who struggle in our midst. We pray to the Lord...

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all who are responsible for governing our institutions of education, that they might always give priority to the special needs students in our school communities. We pray to the Lord...

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all who struggle to parent and educate special needs children, that the care and support of their communities and schools might help sustain them in their labours. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Let us pray for ourselves. That today's presentations and discussions might make us more capable and compassionate educators who can reach out with the heart of Christ to the least of his brothers and sisters. We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For our own intentions...We pray to the Lord.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Now, let us gather the prayers we have spoken and those in the silence of our hearts and unite them to the constant prayer of Jesus to the Father on our behalf, using the prayer he gave us. ***Our Father...***

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord God, as we look toward today's workshop, we ask you to send us the light of your Holy Spirit to open our minds and guide our hearts. By the power of your grace, may our actions help strengthen our school communities' commitment to your Son's Gospel, that they might always honour the needs of your little ones you have called us to serve. We make this prayer to you in Jesus' name.

And may almighty God bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen