

Challenge, Struggle and the Grace that Ignites Hope for our Future

Catholic School Board Leadership Prayer to Begin a New Year

INTRODUCTION

Good morning/afternoon. As we commence this day of planning ahead for our Catholic schools this year, it is fitting that we open with prayer.

Let us begin, then, with the sign of our faith: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

And let us pray...

God our Father, each year is Your gift to us: a gift with its own challenges, struggles and great promise. Through these challenges and struggles, we discover the grace of the Risen Christ, who is with us each day, re-igniting our hope as we walk together as members of His body into the future. Open our minds and hearts now to Your holy word and enable us to pray with one voice, in the unity and joy of Your Holy Spirit. We make this prayer to you through this same Christ our Lord. Amen.

And now, let us listen to God's word.

READING

A reading from the First Letter of Peter (1Pet 3, 8-9,13-15)

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing.

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

The word of the Lord,

Thanks be to God

REFLECTION

St. Peter writes about three things in this reading which continue to speak to us today: Unity, Fearlessness and Hope. The Christians he was writing to were small, fledgling groups of believers. They were united in a common love for Christ, who had called them out of darkness and into His new life. They were a minority, yet did not fear losing political or economic influence as others around them did. They knew it was God who added to their numbers, and enabled them to thrive amid unsympathetic and even hostile cultures. They knew that as long as they honoured Christ, the blessings necessary to live out their mission – to shine with Christ's

light for the world – would follow. They lived by hope: that gift of inward assurance in the power of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, who dwelt within them and enabled them to live, die and rise to eternal life as followers of Jesus.

It's easy for Christians today to get bogged down in worldly rhetoric, speculations and predictions that divide, bring fear and dampen Christ's gift of hope. Political pundits, social commentators and ideologues who dominate television and social media often speak as though our fate is completely in the hands of those with worldly power. St. Peter reminds us that what is important is for us to remember *who* we are as followers of Jesus, and *Whose* we are, as members of His body that share in the riches of every spiritual blessing in heaven as sons and daughters of God (Eph 3,3-4). This is the secret of the great pioneers, innovators and reformers of our faith. In the face of daunting circumstances, beset by doubters and discouraging forecasts, they knew who they were and Whose they were; their hope burned brightly for all to see, as it was constantly re-ignited by the spiritual blessings – the grace – that came from being in relationship with Jesus Christ.

Does it really matter what they are saying about us on Twitter or television this week? Does it really matter what the pundits who observe political movers and shakers are saying about our future? Does it really matter what the ideologues are saying, what the far left is saying, or what the far right is saying?

St. Peter reminds us that at the end of the day, what really matters is that we are able to give a reason for our hope, with gentleness and reverence – to students and parents first; to our colleagues, to ratepayers, and to the world: through our distinctive Catholic curriculum, hall displays, school newsletters, press releases and social media presence. Jesus unites us in the power of His Spirit, makes us fearless; Jesus is our hope; Jesus is the reason for our Catholic schools. He is the reason we continue to foster a school life and corporate vision animated by the Gospel.

Challenges and struggles have always been part of our existence. Let us choose to walk this year in Christian hope, ignited again and again by the grace of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let us pray for the Church. That all who call Jesus "Lord" will always choose to walk in the gift of hope when beset by challenges and struggles.

We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for the world. That Christ might give His peace and strength to all God's children in the face of forces which seek to promote fear, division and hopelessness among them.

We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for all who face the challenges and struggles of difficult and uncertain circumstances among our families, colleagues and wider community. That they might encounter hope and

healing in Christ, and in those around them.
We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for the students we have been called to serve. That their hope in Christ might be constantly re-ignited as they learn and grow in the light of Christian faith each day in our Catholic schools.
We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for the colleagues who depend on our leadership. That Christ's gift of hope might burn brightly within them each day through the challenges and struggles of the year.
We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

Let us pray for ourselves. That we might be united in faith, fearless in the abiding gift of the Holy Spirit, and overflowing in hope as we walk in the grace Christ's love this year.
We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

For all other intentions that remain unspoken and in our hearts.
We pray to the Lord. *Lord, hear our prayer.*

And now, let us call out in hope to our good and gracious Father with one voice, united with Jesus in the gift of His Holy Spirit, using the words He gave us: ***Our Father...***

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God,
You sent your Son Jesus to be our hope.
We feel his promised Spirit at work within us;
We recognize his Risen Presence among us
As we gather in his name in prayer,
And celebrate the Eucharist.
He is the hope which inspires us
To share as members of the Catholic educational community
In your Church's mission
To announce the Good News
To the whole world.
We thank you for the gift of Catholic education.
May it continue to be
A place where Christ ignites within us
An abiding confidence
In a future filled with hope.
We make this prayer through this same Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

(Catholic Education Week 2020 Prayer)

And may Almighty God bless us: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.