

**4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – B (January 29, 2012)**  
**(Catholic Schools Week – Church’s teaching mission)**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

Every year at this time, in late January to early February, the Church in this country celebrates Catholic Schools Week, and we do so once again beginning with this weekend’s Masses. It is always a great occasion to thank God for the opportunity we have as Church to provide our young people with a solid education on all fronts. This certainly includes all the usual school subjects (e.g. science, math, and social studies), but most importantly we are able to do so on the foundation of Jesus Christ and our Catholic faith. And this year our local CVCS celebration of Catholic Schools Week takes on special importance. In addition to all the special activities of this week, including the all-CVCS Mass at the Columbus High School gym this coming Wednesday morning at 9:30 (to which you are all welcome), we are seeing more and more progress in the construction of our brand new middle school. We are really excited about the opening of Blessed Maria Assunta Pallotta Catholic Middle School this fall. This is going to be a huge step forward for Catholic education here in the Cedar Valley, and you can be assured of hearing much more about it over the next several months. And in case you are wondering, no—it is not at all too late to contribute to our CVCS capital campaign for the middle school, other improvements, and the endowment fund. I just wanted to assure you about that...please see me if you have any questions about it.

The gospel we heard today could not possibly be more relevant or timely for this Catholic Schools Week kickoff. St. Mark tells us of Jesus entering the synagogue at Capernaum and exercising the role of a teacher. In fact, we are told the people there were astonished and amazed at his teaching since “he taught them as one having authority.” They were also amazed, of course, when Jesus demonstrated his divine power by healing and delivering the man who was oppressed by an unclean spirit. We know that one of Jesus most important works during his public ministry was precisely that of teaching. How often the gospels present Jesus in this mode, whether he is teaching the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount or giving fuller and more detailed teaching to his apostles. Jesus was always teaching about the kingdom of God, how we are to love God above all else and our neighbor as ourselves, and how Jesus himself is the one sure path to the Father and his kingdom.

But then Jesus did even more—he not only was a teacher himself but he also provided the means by which his teaching would be handed on. Remember the end of Matthew’s gospel? Before Jesus ascended into heaven (after he rose from the dead), he gave the remaining eleven apostles (Judas, of course, was no longer with them) a most important commission. He said that all power and full authority in heaven and on earth had been given to him. Then he conferred his authority to them—the same authority that so amazed the folks at the synagogue in Capernaum: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” Jesus very clearly gave the apostles the authority to teach in his name, to teach and to hand on what they had received from Jesus himself. The apostles did so, heroically and authentically, to the point of martyrdom for all except St. John.

That teaching work has continued ever since—for nearly 2000 years now. The apostles named others to carry on that work, and rightly so since they knew they themselves would not live forever. That process has been repeated throughout history to our own time, and will be to the end of time. This is partly what we mean by saying the Church is apostolic, the last of the four marks of the Church (“one, holy, catholic and apostolic”)—it is founded on the apostles who were taught by Christ. Many of the great saints have also carried on that teaching work, saints like Angela Merici, Thomas Aquinas and John Bosco whose feasts we celebrate in late January. In our own time, that teaching is done on many levels: Pope Benedict, our own Archbishop Hanus, priests and deacons, and all our other lay and religious teachers in our Catholic schools and religious education programs. And I dare not forget to mention you parents—as the Church firmly declares, you are the first and primary teachers of your children in the ways of faith.

The others I mentioned certainly have important roles, but they are to support your parental role which is uniquely important and is irreplaceable.

And what is it that we are taught? What is that teaching that is the basis of our Catholic schools, our Catholic Church and faith? It is the person of Jesus Christ and the message of Jesus Christ. In other words, it is the **truth**—that which is real. Remember Jesus' words to the apostles at the Last Supper: "I am the way, the truth and the life—no one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus claimed to be the truth, the one way to the Father. He was not at all unsure or hesitant about this; his teaching was clear and unmistakable. That kind of certitude, that kind of claim to truth is not at all well received in our world and culture today—especially when it comes to the truth about who and what we are as God's children and how we ought to conduct ourselves. Before he was elected as Pope Benedict in 2005, Cardinal Ratzinger warned that: "We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires." Relativism is the idea that there is no universal truth that applies to everyone, but instead that truth differs among persons and cultures. Either Jesus Christ is who and what he says he is (and therefore his gospel makes very real claims on us), or the relativists are right and we are each free to make up our own "truths". Both of these cannot be true at the same time; they are mutually exclusive.

I will speak more about this idea of relativism at another time. But it is vitally important for us to know and to remember what we believe and why we believe it. We believe in the person and the gospel of Jesus Christ because he is truly the Son of God who became one of us on this earth, who died on the Cross and who rose from the dead. Jesus taught the truth about himself and the gospel way of life and call to conversion to which we are all called, a teaching with authority that was handed on by the apostles and by those who came after them. This is the teaching, the truth that is the solid rock foundation of our Catholic schools and our Catholic Church and faith. May we grow in gratitude for the gift of that saving truth; may we reaffirm our commitment to live it and witness to it, and may we share as we are called in the Church's mission of handing on that teaching to those who will follow after us.

