

**4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – C (January 31, 2010)**  
**Fr. Jerry Kopacek**

One of the characteristics of this season of Ordinary Time is that the gospel readings do not focus on one particular in Jesus' life (e.g. his birth, suffering, death or resurrection), but rather provide an overview of his public life. During that three-year period, he gave special attention to teaching—teaching the people about God's call and desire for their conversion and their growth in holiness, and the central role of Jesus himself in their hope for eternal life. We know, of course, that Jesus' teaching was not always embraced with great enthusiasm—we remember his regular debates with the scribes and Pharisees. Even in today's gospel, in an episode at the beginning of his public life and in his own hometown of Nazareth, he spoke of how he would be rejected by many; indeed, his listeners got so angry that they wanted to throw him down the hill.

But Jesus was never dissuaded—he kept on teaching the people, and he commissioned the apostles to carry on his teaching after he would ascend into heaven. Once they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, those apostles carried on that teaching work with great strength and fervor as did those who succeeded in their leadership roles. St. Paul was certainly one of the greatest teachers and preachers of Jesus Christ the world has ever known. His letters convey in so many ways who and what we are as children of God and members of the Body of Christ; our reading today from his first letter to the Corinthians is that magnificent description of genuine love that we often hear at weddings and other occasions as well.

That teaching role continues to be an essential responsibility of the Church in the world today. Pope Benedict continues to proclaim the teachings of the gospel and of the Catholic faith to a world that grows ever more distant from God and his saving truth. Archbishop Hanus and the other bishops of the world, the successors of the apostles, proclaim that same gospel in union with the pope and they do so in particular response to what is going on in our own time and place. I think, for example, of the U.S. bishops' increasingly firm and clear public voice on the right to life for the unborn child. Recall also Archbishop Hanus' clear reminders about the basic rights and dignity of the migrants in our midst—especially after the raid in Postville a couple of years ago. The pope and the bishops are often criticized and even ridiculed for their teaching efforts, but in this they are only following the example of Jesus and the apostles who were also and often rejected in many ways—often to the point of being put to death.

The pope and the bishops are the primary teachers of the faith, but they are not alone in this fundamental task. We priests certainly share in that responsibility; the ordination rite gives special prominence to the teaching task we are given. And you know that that is a role that I take seriously...and frankly, I truly enjoy it. Whether it is the occasional teaching homily or speaking in other forums (adult education classes, RCIA and others), it is a great privilege for me to share the riches and the beauty of our Catholic faith as well as the challenges of living that faith authentically.

That teaching task is carried out in a variety of other ways as well. As we begin our annual observance of Catholic Schools Week, it is certainly and particularly appropriate to acknowledge the critical importance of our schools in this arena. And I want to repeat what I have said before on this subject: in praising our Catholic schools in general and our own Cedar Valley Catholic Schools in particular, I do not and will not criticize those who choose our public schools for their children. I am a product of the public schools in Britt (up there in north-central Iowa; you know, God's country...), and I got a great education there for which I will always be grateful. But our Catholic schools have an advantage that is very real and is undeniable: in the midst of teaching the other subjects found in other schools, we are also able to teach and talk about the ultimate truth and reality—God who created us, redeemed us in his Son Jesus Christ, and who calls us to eternal life by his death and resurrection. It is always a joy for me to go and visit the classes here at St. Ed's school. I can affirm, for example, that our pre-schoolers know the Guardian Angel prayer very well, that our second-graders are learning much about the Eucharist as they prepare for

their first Holy Communion a few months from now, and that our older students have put together service learning projects and high-tech, multi-media presentations on the saints that are truly impressive, to say the very least! I can also affirm the fact that our school teachers, administrators and support staff do a fantastic job; I see it all the time. They take very seriously their vocation as teachers and witnesses of our faith, but they do it with a joy that is beautiful to see.

In the bulletin insert today regarding Catholic Schools Week [which I commend to your reading; lots of good information in it], Archbishop Hanus has a message in which he refers to the four pillars of Catholic education: faith, knowledge, discipline and morals. Discipline, of course, is a concern in all schools, as is the teaching of knowledge—the academic focus. The Catholic schools in our archdiocese do an especially good job in that arena; the bulletin insert has some very interesting information attesting to the academic excellence of our students. But again, that discipline and those academics are presented in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church—those other two pillars of faith and morals that the archbishop mentioned. The reason for the existence of our Catholic schools in the first place is to integrate, to weave together all those areas of knowledge and help form the child, the young person as a disciple of Jesus and to live that discipleship in whatever career or vocation to which he or she is called. Religion is not simply one isolated class having nothing to do with the rest of the school day; the person and the teachings of Christ and of our Catholic faith permeate the whole curriculum and the whole environment of our Catholic schools in ways that are simply not possible in our public schools.

On top of all this, we are getting close to taking a very important step forward on behalf of our own Cedar Valley Catholic Schools—Columbus High School and the grade schools at St. Edward, Sacred Heart and Blessed Sacrament. You have noticed in the bulletins for the last couple of weeks some information about the capital campaign for CVCS; there will be more of that information in the next several weeks as well. This campaign is a critical part of the CVCS strategic plan that was developed a number of years ago; the funds raised will be used to do much-needed improvements and renovations at Columbus and the parish grade schools, increasing the endowment to provide financial security and further tuition assistance, and building a middle school for grades 6-8 on the Columbus campus. The campaign goal is \$10.5 million; the silent phase of the campaign has already resulted in \$3.5 million raised in pledges. The public phase of this campaign will begin in the near future; you will certainly be hearing from me and reading a lot more in detail about it in coming weeks and months. I'm completely on board with this, and I hope and pray that you will be as well.

Our faith in Jesus Christ and our life in the Catholic Church are such amazing rich blessings for us. With those blessings come the responsibility and the challenge to live and teach and share that faith with others, especially our young people. May God continue to bless all our efforts—through our Catholic schools and other religious education and faith formation programs—to carry on the teaching mission of Jesus and of the Church he entrusted to us.