

More Than Followers

Christ the Teacher Catholic Schools are in the midst of a three-year faith focus under the umbrella of Discipleship. We are *Following Christ* with a focus on chosen virtues. In the 2019-2020 school year special attention was given to **Compassion** and **Holiness** for the first two letters in Christ's name. This year our focus is on **Respect** and **Integrity** for the middle two letters, and in the 2021-2022 school year we will give focused attention to **Service** and **Thanksgiving** for the last two letters. Certainly, we practice the various virtues all the time, but focused attention on specific virtues will hopefully help students to understand their meaning and learn how to live out those virtues in an effort to become more like Jesus. After all, it is not enough to simply follow Christ. Father Stephen Bill, in a homily on May 7, 2020 reminded us that even Judas was a follower and yet he betrayed Jesus. Father Stephen went on to pose the question, "Will we simply be followers or will we be disciples who imitate Jesus?" Engaging in the virtues will help us to not only follow Christ but to imitate him, become more like him, and grow more and more into the image and likeness of God.

Our model for respect comes from the mutual respect that exists within the Trinity. In Jesus' priestly prayer, he prayed for his followers then and now. He prays for our union with God and with one another. He prays that we may be one as he and the Father are one. In his homily on May 28, 2020, Father Rick Krofchek shared that a unity of mutual love and respect exists in God's self. The Son is totally respectful of the Father in that he is totally obedient to the Father's will. The Father is totally respectful and vulnerable before the Son in who he has given a special mission and has complete trust that the Son will carry it out. This is what Jesus requests for us and from us in his prayer – a oneness, a unity of respect and love that he and his Father share. Sometimes we find it difficult to respect those who think differently than we do or those who have opinions in opposition to our opinions. Jesus prays and asks the Father on our behalf that we would live in communion with one another. This doesn't mean we all need to think, act, behave, and look the same. Rather, it means we respect one another with a mutual kind of reverence and love, as expressed in the Golden Rule, that brings people together rather than that which moves them apart. This is Jesus' prayer for us. We must work to help our students and one another understand the importance of respecting difference rather than allowing difference to create division. This will be of utmost importance as we forge ahead into the uncertainties and challenges which Covid has and continues to force upon us. We will need to move forward together in a united front, respectful of one another, in order to continue our journey and do the work which God has called us to despite the Covid limitations.

Integrity is best illustrated by the God who never changes. In the Letter to the Hebrews we are reminded that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." God does what he says and his covenant love is always dependable. The biblical virtue of integrity points to a consistency between what is inside and what is outside, between belief and behaviour, our words and our ways, our attitudes and our actions, our values and our practice. We are working to instill these understandings in our students and in one another. We are trying to help one another recognize that integrity is about imitating Christ and not merely following him. It's about the

importance of modeling Christ's character which is accomplished when we engage in and live out the virtues.

Of course, this is all easier said than done. However, Steve Angrisano, in his address to our staff at the beginning of this school year, reminded us that God is as close to us as our breath guiding us as we strive to grow more and more into his image and likeness by following the example of his Son. In this age of mandatory mask usage, where we feel our breath against our skin all the time, we have the constant reminder of God's nearness. With this reality in mind, may we always strive to instill the various virtues in our students and in one another in an effort to respond to the call to "make disciples of all nations."

Loving Father,
You call us to follow and imitate Your Son
and walk in the light of his truth
so that we may be holy as You are holy.

We are fortified by the example of Jesus
whose strength of character and integrity of spirit
enabled him to fulfill his mission
with unwavering love and respect for You and for all.
Help us walk in his ways
so that we may be an example for others.

Help us proclaim the Good News of Your kingdom
in all our words and actions
and transform us more and more
into the image and likeness
of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

May Your Holy Spirit give us courage and wisdom
to be faithful disciples
and may following Christ become our way of life.

Amen.