

AWE

Authenticity, Witness and Excellence



Bishop Gary Gordon



‘Go, your faith has saved you’

ICS Professional Development Day Mass
St. Edward’s Parish, Duncan
November 14, 2016

Well, I can tell I’m in a Catholic crowd—most everyone is near the back! was the ‘three Rs’, *reading*, *riting* and *rithmetic*.

I don’t have an opportunity very often to celebrate Mass with all of you, or even to have you all assembled in one place, so what I want to reflect upon with you is the incredible joy, blessing and grace of the blind man. And indeed I pray, too, that I may become as blind as he is, and poor, begging at the side of the road. For his poverty, his blindness, were not stumbling blocks to his perceiving the presence of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. He cried out, and in that cry, received not only sight, but an incredible joy for living, for following, for being a disciple. As the Gospel tells us, *Go, your faith has saved you*.

This is indeed probably the word of a Catholic educational institution, of our schools, to those students and their families. At the end of the day, we can say, *Go, your faith has saved you*. This is vitally important, especially as this morning’s professional development program will address and look at three things that are affecting our students, and probably affecting us too: *anxiety*, *self-harm*, and *suicide*. Who woulda thunk it, 25 years ago, that this would be a subject that would be part of a Professional Development Day? I always thought it

But today, it is anxiety, self-harm, and suicide. Grave, grave problems. Well, you will no doubt receive some wonderful counsel from a professional. But I’d like

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to suggest something that will last for our students, and for us.

While I’m speaking, I want you to look at my cross. I think they still do this in schools: they hand something out at the front and they say, “Pass it back, I want



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you all to have a look at that.” So, I just want you to pass that cross around.

This morning, I want to speak about this cry of the blind man, and the amazing grace of hearing Jesus say to him, “Go, your faith has saved you.” And in that light, to look at something that I believe is our call and invitation as Catholic educational institutions. It is the fact that our schools are *AWEsome*. That we are invited to create AWE with our parents and our students. That they are in AWE of you! That they are in AWE of this Catholic school.

AWE. Authenticity, Witness, and Excellence. And I have every hope that with AWE, and I’ve told this to the principals more than once, with Authenticity, Witness, and Excellence, every town in this Diocese will want one of your schools! They’ll want one! And that AWE will be paid for by the local community. That would be amazing, and I believe it is possible.

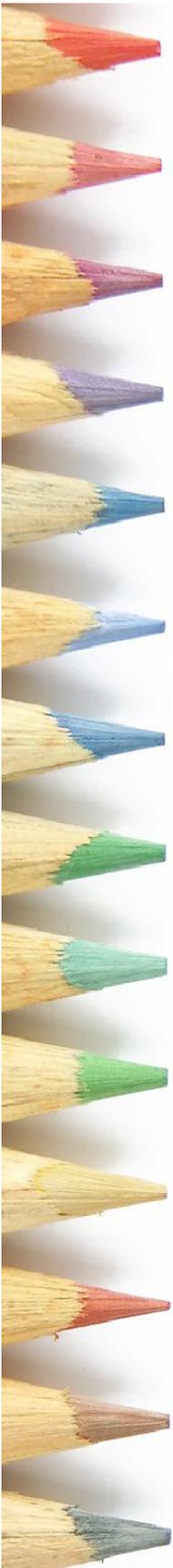
So you might be thinking to yourselves, *What is this Authenticity? What is it to be an ‘authentic’ Catholic school?* Well, to tell you the truth, it has nothing to do with the school. To be an authentic Catholic school and an authentic Catholic educator is rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. It is a covenant. It is a covenant of relationship that has eternal implications. It is a covenant in Jesus Christ, who is the *raison d’être* of a Catholic school. There is no other reason for its existence, except Jesus Christ. And you’ll see that in the cross when it gets there, and what I’m talking about.

Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ found, experienced, and lived, in the parish community, in the Eucharistic assembly. It’s not an idea, it’s not some sort of spirit thing out there in the stars, it is his body and blood, soul and divinity, truly and really present in the Eucharist. This is why authenticity for a Catholic school is in the parish. It’s not in the school. It’s in the worshipping assembly of his body, the Church, gathered around a pastor, around the table of the Word, and the Eucharist,

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where we become what we receive: holy communion. The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.

Our students and our parents deserve nothing less than this authenticity as Catholics in a Catholic school. If an educator or a staff member has signed up as a Catholic, and shows up on Monday morning having not participated with the Eucharistic assembly, it is a disaster for the school. It is a countersign. It is so disastrous that the long-term effects of not being in communion with the Eucharistic assembly week in, and week out, will end up so weakening the identity of the school that it will simply be a building with a name, and not a Catholic school.



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So that's why I say, authenticity has nothing to do with the school. It has everything to do with a personal relationship with our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who is the one who heals, and who says to each of us, day in and day out, "Go, your faith has saved you." This is how we live our lives as Catholics. It is around the table of the sacrificed Christ. It is to participate consciously and fully in the life of our parish community. It is the invitation that is given to us if we are to be authentic.

And this authenticity creates *witness*. It is a witness that becomes the way of encountering our students. It is a witness to the ongoing challenge of the poor, the hungry, the homeless. It is a witness that is spoken about by Pope Francis when he says he wants a *revolution of tenderness*. And that revolution of tenderness is what we find in the cross.

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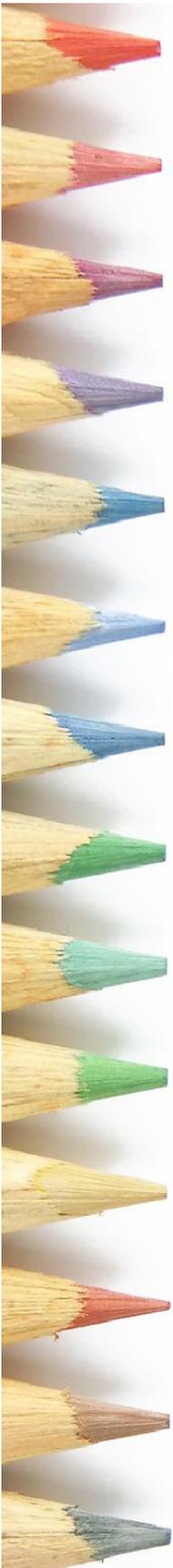
Will that create *excellence*, AWE? Absolutely. It will be an excellence that everyone will want to imitate. It will be an excellence that will be so profound and so marked that—hold on to this—the parish communities will make sure there's no tuition. How about that? Authenticity and witness creates an excellence that is so great

that the poorest, the weakest and the most vulnerable will be filling our schools. And everyone will want one of our schools.

Finally, we are part of a profound proclamation of God's presence. When our students are crying out because of anxiety, because of self-harm, and sometimes suicide, this anguish of the spirit is a spiritual anguish. It is an empty hole in the hearts of our young that is crying out, and there is only one person who can fill that: it is Jesus Christ. It is

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his body. It is his life. It is not the simple solution of 'Jesus, joy, and jellybeans', but it is rather to encounter Jesus Christ in the depth and profound love that each of you witnesses to, with your students. It is to know that when they leave home, often broken and fragmented, when they leave their television set, which is fragmenting them more, and their little smartphones that they play with, they will encounter the living Christ in you. And their anguish,



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their cry, will receive the tenderness of God's revolutionary love.

That's quite a dream, isn't it? But it's not a dream. It's real, and it can happen, and it's going to happen in our schools, I am sure of it, so that everyone will want one. I think I've often told Kathy Korman, "When are you going to build a high school in Duncan?" I've often told the two pastors in Nanaimo, "When are you going to get a high school or an elementary school going?" There's only 120,000 people up there.

And it will happen, with authenticity, Catholic identity, and excellence.

Let me leave you with a little story. I started off in school a long time ago, and then I remember as a deacon I got to be in a parish where there was a school. And I was just dying to get in to the classroom. I hadn't been in a classroom with little kids since I was a little kid! I thought, *Wow, this is going to be so cool.* So I went in to the classroom; it was grade one and they had invited me in, and I was talking to the little kids, and of course they've all got their hands up at the same time. "Yes, Billy?"

"You know, my mom and dad had an argument last night." We find out the darndest things from the little kids. They tell you everything, I love it!

So then I thought, *I'll go write something on the board so they can remember what we're talking about.* So I wrote JESUS on the board. I'll never forget, the teacher kind of whispered in my ear, "They can't read!"

Who was teaching whom, eh?

Is excellence possible, as a Catholic school? Absolutely. It begins not in the school, though. It begins in the parish community as a Eucharistic assembly living as the body and the blood of Christ, full active and conscious participation in the *raison d'être* for our existence: Jesus Christ. Truly and really present in this Eucharist, body, soul and divinity.

We've got some ways to go, but we are on the way. May each of us be so authentic in our identity that the witness will simply come out of our pores in love, and that we will be part of what Pope Francis wants, a revolution of tenderness, in the love and grace and power of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

**Go, your faith
has saved you.**

