

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time B

Mathias Loras was the first bishop of Dubuque. He was a French missionary priest in Louisiana when he was named bishop in 1837. One of the first things that he did when he arrived in his new diocese was to begin a school. The school was not only for young men interested in the priesthood but also for lay people interested in acquiring an education. That school eventually evolved into Loras College.

It was the third bishop of Dubuque, John Hennessy, who grew the Catholic school system in the Archdiocese in the second half of the 19th century. He was responding to the growing Catholic immigrant population of Irish, Germans and Bohemians who were settling in Iowa at that time. There was a suspicion among Catholics of that era that the public school systems throughout the country were heavily influenced by Protestantism and hence not a good place for Catholics to receive their education. My hometown of less than 1,500 people, for example, supported two Catholic parishes and two Catholic schools educating kids from 1st through 12th grades – one for the Irish and one for the Germans.

I mention all of this because this week is National Catholic Schools week – a yearly event that enables us to reflect on Catholic schools and their service to both the Church and the nation. What experience, if any, have you had of Catholic Schools?

The scripture readings that we just heard point out to us the value of having the faith passed on from one generation to the next in a formal way. For example, in the first reading from the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy we hear Moses, who has been a prophet for his people for many years, telling his people that God will raise up another prophet like him. In

fact, many prophets followed Moses insuring that God's teachings were always known to his people.

Jesus, as the gospel reading suggests, was the ultimate prophet that followed Moses. He was recognized as someone who taught with authority not only through his powerful Sabbath teaching but also through his power over evil.

I am a product of Catholic schools from first grade to a doctoral degree in theology. Most of my priesthood has been taken up in teaching at Catholic schools on the elementary, high school and college levels.

What I like about Catholic schools from both a student and teacher perspective is the time that can be devoted to developing a religious topic. When a topic is spread out over a semester or more it gives the student the time to reflect, to understand and to compare information received from other classes in science, history, etc. Take for example the sophomores that attend Xavier High School. I have been interviewing some of them as they prepare for Confirmation. They tell me that last semester they studied the Old Testament. What a blessing to spend a whole semester studying God's Word in a school environment that fosters prayer and Catholic values.

My faith has its foundations with my parents. They taught me how to pray, they taught me how to serve, they taught me that I was loved as I am. They laid a great foundation that my Catholic education built upon.

The pastors in the metro area are in conversation now about Catholic education. We believe that there will always be Catholic schools here... what they will look like in the future

will probably be different from what they look like now. There is a future for Catholic education... will you help to make that future a reality?