



JANUARY 1

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son,
born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under
the law, so that we might receive adoption.

—**Galatians 4:4–5**

Today is the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. Mary, as Jesus' Mother, knew him better than anyone else with whom he interacted throughout the course of his time on earth. In fact, Mary is the only person to have remained unquestionably faithful to Jesus throughout his entire earthly life, from his conception by the power of the Holy Spirit (see Lk 1:31) through his passion and crucifixion (see Jn 19:25)—as well as during his resurrection and ascension, and then Pentecost and beyond. Although our students are not quite divine (even if some of them may think so), they are indeed children of God and therefore deserve our concern for their spiritual well-being. Your belief in your students' God-given worth, value, and dignity may be the only source of hope and encouragement that they receive on a given day. Mary's selfless support for Jesus has given us a model of constant fidelity to the Lord and of inviting others to follow him. Remain devoted to seeking opportunities to bring your students to know Jesus Christ.

JANUARY 2

[Jesus] said in reply, “He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom.”

—**Matthew 13:37–38a**

The Catholic school teacher is constantly “planting seeds.” However, we must recall that Jesus himself is the actual “sower,” and we merely cooperate with him, through the power of the Holy Spirit, as he does his good work in our students. These spiritual seeds will not necessarily sprout while the student is in school. Make sure that you plant mustard seeds (see Mt 13:31–32), rather than poison ivy or nettles. Give students the spiritual foundation that they will need to flourish into adult men and women replete with spiritual wisdom. Make sure that your lessons are oriented toward the gospel in such a way that they allow your students to enhance their relationship with Jesus Christ. Corroborate the good lessons that they have received from other teachers, because students will reliably flourish from the spirit of professionalism and collegiality that is fostered within a Catholic school. Our youth are still learning and getting used to how to navigate life in a way that orients themselves to God’s kingdom.

JANUARY 3

Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it.

—**Proverbs 22:6**

Lesson planning can be either one of the most difficult or one of the most rewarding of endeavors for the Catholic school teacher. On various occasions, it can be both. No matter your field of pedagogical expertise, you must aim to design good lessons. Make sure that your lessons provide an educational foundation for your students that

will eventually enable them likewise to establish the framework for teaching others whenever they have the opportunity in the future. No matter what subject you teach, determine how your lesson is going to serve your students both now and decades from now, so that it provides for their ultimately enduring wisdom. Especially in terms of lessons in morality—which can, depending on the scope of your course, easily be intertwined into your curricular framework—always be on the lookout for those “teachable moments” that will show your students the lesson’s broader implications for humanity. The more solid your students’ training, the more they will appreciate your contribution.

JANUARY 4

But whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

—**Matthew 5:19b**

Our students are looking for objective moral truth. Every teacher has been a teenager. For younger teachers, you may have been a teenager just a few years ago, while for older teachers, it has been . . . well, longer. However, no matter how long ago you were a teenager, you probably had your fair share of dire questions, doubts, uncertainties, preoccupations, and ponderings about how the world works, especially in terms of matters of faith. In the midst of modern times, society is often unwilling to provide anyone, let alone the youth, with semblances of certainty regarding living a life of faith. Therefore, look for ways to lead students to become familiar with God’s commands—including, at a minimum, the Ten Commandments. Have your students know them, perhaps by reading the account of their first scriptural appearance via Moses in Exodus 20:1–17, or by reviewing the familiar “Traditional Catechetical Formula” (available

for free on the Vatican's website). Draw your students to know and love the Lord's will.

JANUARY 5

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.

—1 Peter 3:15b

Absolutely, look for opportunities to provide your students with testimony of your faith in Jesus Christ. Wondering about questions of faith is a natural, normal, healthy curiosity that students may have, and this can serve as yet another opportunity for them to gain wisdom from an adult figure. What is your *story*? This does not mean that every class session has to feature an exercise in homiletics, but take advantage of chances to share your faith experience with your students. Many students are genuinely inquisitive about others' journeys with Christ, especially since they often have so many questions about matters of faith, whether those questions are general or specific. Sharing your own experience of faith allows your students to realize that you are a human being, rather than an automated production from the assembly line at the teacher factory. Allowing your students to see your rich faith in Christ will allow them, in turn, to have faith in your own genuineness.

JANUARY 6

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them.

—Romans 12:6

Encourage your students to use their God-given gifts and talents. For the sake of clarity, *talent* here does not signify the ability to chew gum in class without getting caught, or the ability of a guy to devise a creative way to ask a girl out to prom. Gifts and talents that could glorify God include musical performance, intellectual pursuits,

athletic abilities, and so forth. Remind your students that they do not have to wait until graduation to start using their gifts, but no gift should ever be self-serving. Help them to distinguish between gifts that will contribute to the kingdom of God and gifts that are not as noble. If you have students who are good writers, teach them that effective writing can be used to compose a treatise on the Church's teachings on the "four last things," rather than to post on social media an eloquent description of how the demands of their most difficult teacher are probably getting them time off Purgatory. Every student has a treasury of gifts to help serve the kingdom of God. Your students' souls will thank you in the end.

JANUARY 7

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another.

—Colossians 3:16a

There is a great store of spiritual richness that comes from being a positive influence within any institution. This is especially true within a Catholic school, in which the gospel should permeate every aspect of the school's educational framework in order to be effective. Any stranger walking into the school for the first time should know that it is a Catholic institution. Negativity reliably drains the life out of any community that could otherwise prosper in various ways, and a faith-based community is hardly immune. This negativity can come in various forms, whether manifested as cynicism, pessimism, resentment, acrimony, biting sarcasm, passive aggression, doctrinal dissent, or some other mindset that casts a dark cloud of despair over every avenue that the offender frequents. Alternatively, being a positive person leads others to see the light of Christ by your presence. If criticism (or better, *critique*) must ever be offered, ensure that this

is carried out with joyful charity, so that it is ultimately constructive in its scope.

JANUARY 8

[Show] yourself as a model of good deeds in every respect, with integrity in your teaching, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be criticized.

—**Titus 2:7–8a**

One of the most vital lessons that a teacher can bestow is the need to acknowledge that no one knows it all. The totality of facts regarding all that has ever been, all that is, and all that will ever be is far too elusive for any one human being to obtain, even if a lifetime were allotted for such an initiative. Remind your students that life is not measured by how much we know, but by what we do with the time that God has given us. Of course, the teacher should be well versed in the content of his course. After all, a theology student would be lead astray to think that the names of the three Magi were Larry, Moe, and Curly, and a chemistry student would be disadvantaged to believe that the atomic number for platinum referred to how many albums his favorite singer has sold. If you were unclear in presenting material, or made a mistake when writing a test that coerced students into answering incorrectly, give them an opportunity to make up the points lost. Your example of Christian mercy could be an even more effective lesson in the end.

JANUARY 9

Hold fast to instruction, never let it go; keep it, for it is your life.

—**Proverbs 4:13**

The best teachers are the best students. It takes courage to pause and remember what life was like “on the other side of the desk.” Teachers should always aim to continue learning. This learning can be of the

formal variety, such as through professional development, continuing education, advanced degrees, seminars, and so on. This is true for learning about both course content and pedagogy. However, informal learning is similarly vital to the educator's growth. New teachers should seek, and be supported by, the wisdom of veteran teachers. Meanwhile, the veterans should allow themselves to be inspired by the imagination and energy of new teachers. Regarding faith, strive to continue learning about the Lord and Christian principles. You may never receive a gold star sticker for your efforts, but your overall effectiveness as a teacher will be strengthened, ultimately enriching your Catholic school community. Also, never be afraid to learn from students. Many have a deep, abiding faith that we ought to appreciate for our own inspiration.

JANUARY 10

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

—1 Corinthians 15:58

Make sure to understand the vast distinction between stubbornness and determination, whether in terms of yourself or your students. Stubbornness is essentially vanity, and it is often rife with the dreadful effects of pride, while determination will have positive results, particularly in matters of faith. Make sure that you are not somehow merely going through the motions when it comes to presenting your lessons to your students, stubbornly speeding through the material simply to cover it. Make sure that your students are ultimately grasping the lesson at hand. Determination equated with perseverance is what will lead to enduring comprehension. In terms of encouraging your students' faith, leading them to know Christ is of utmost importance, and this determination should underscore a Catholic school teacher's educational framework. Working for the kingdom of God will not necessarily be accompanied by a flashy career or

temporal success, but determination in leading others to the gospel will truly “bear fruit that will remain” (Jn 15:16).

JANUARY 11

But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant.

—**Mark 10:43**

The ideal Catholic community is one in which all stakeholders embody an attitude of service. From the student to the administrator, from the teacher to the custodian, from the parent volunteer to the coach on the field, a truly Christ-centered school must inherently, and necessarily, possess a framework that provides for acts of service—for chances to put others before oneself. The New Testament is rife with “servant” imagery. In fact, each of the gospels mentions the role of “servant” at least once. And it is hardly a coincidence that the more beloved heroes from national and world history were often powerful leaders who served others through deed and example. In the theology or history classroom, endeavor to highlight those saintly servants who happened to be royalty or nobility and used that status for good, such as Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Margaret of Scotland, Saint Wenceslaus, and so on. (Students wishing to receive bonus points might wish to point out to the right teacher that Saint Margaret was Scottish, or attempt to spell *Wenceslaus* for extra credit.)

JANUARY 12

But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow.

—**Matthew 6:33–34a**

Before you leave school at the end of each day, think about at least one event that occurred that day for which you can smile. Especially

aim to do this on days that did not go very well, for one reason or another. Perhaps a student let you down through his or her misbehavior. Perhaps you did not finish all of your grading, and now you have to take home a foot-tall stack of essays to read through. Perhaps the photocopier was malfunctioning, and you learned just how strong the temptation was to bestow upon it a variety of colorful epithets. No matter the trials that you face each day, at least one event or student's action should make you smile when you take the time for reflection. It could have been a colleague thanking you, a student holding the door open for you, or some other uplifting moment in the midst of adversity that will benefit your ultimate well-being as an educator. Make sure that your educational philosophy truly furthers the gospel, and you shall remain confident in your teaching role. God's gift of tomorrow is a new day to look forward to.

JANUARY 13

Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength.

—**Deuteronomy 6:5**

Teaching is exhausting work. You plan lessons. You supervise extracurricular duties. You are on your feet for hours on end. Exhaustion is perhaps especially true for the novice teacher, who is still attempting to navigate the myriad day-to-day expectations of an educator's life. However, even veteran teachers can be fatigued by trying to keep up with the many demands of the teaching profession. When the Lord is at the forefront of our day, all other matters fall into place. This means loving God with the fullness of ourselves. Our hearts must be open to him in order to receive his mercy. We must make sure that other aspects of our lives (not merely our educational outlook) are oriented toward his will. We must use every ounce of our strength to bring him glory. If your body is exhausted from physical