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Make This New School Year ‘The Year of the Question’

by Mary Clifford Morrell

“Where are you?”

It’s the first question God asks of Adam in the Garden of Eden, and it’s a question I’ve asked my children hundreds of times when they were young.

Loving parents do that. They want to know where their children are, including their adult children, not only physically but in their heads, as well. What do they think, what’s important to them, what do they hope for the future?

It seems Jesus understood that the art of asking good questions constitutes an important skill when engaging young disciples in the practice of their faith – an art worthy of developing for this new school year.

As lesson plans are in the making, and textbooks being reviewed, a question we may ask ourselves is “Why do we, and our students, need to be reflective?”

Renowned educator, Thomas Groome, taught about the Catholic principle of sacramentality. The principal says that everything in creation may reveal God, and underscores the connection between God's revelation, reflection and faith. "God's presence and grace in the ordinary things of life justify the every day life experiences as a source of reflection and conation [purpose]. Likewise, newly gained wisdom needs to be put into action, for the participants to be true 'agents' of their own faith."

Jesus understood that his followers were people in process. His questions were meant to encourage that process so they could continue to grow in faith and come to develop a deep relationship with God.

How might we help that process in students this year, following the example of Christ and his questions?



Familiarize yourself with the questions Jesus asked, read them in context of Scripture and pray with them, looking also for responses from those to whom he spoke:

- "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ... "But who do you say that I am?" (Read Matthew 13-15)
- "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Read Matthew 14:25-33)
- "Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" (Read Luke 10:30-37)
- "What do you want me to do for you?" (Read Luke 18:35-43)
- "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? ... What could one give in exchange for his life?" (Read Mark 8:34-38)
- "Do you want to get well?" (Read John 5:5-9)

Consider that every question you ask does at least one of the following:

- Engages students, reveals something about a student, encourages students to a higher level of thinking, teaches a lesson, fosters self-correction, builds relationships, reinforces a thought, nurtures reflection.

Remember, the most important principle:

- Questioning is just one of many methods or tools for teaching religion and forming faith in the classroom, but, as the “General Directory for Catechesis” stresses, nothing is more important in every phase of the catechetical process than the person of the catechist, whether it be a Catholic school teacher, parish catechist or parent.
- The ability to be a faithful witness and live the Gospel are gifts of the Holy Spirit to the catechist and serve as the soul of catechetical ministry.

As the new school year gets underway, we can return to the words of St. Pope John Paul II, who was a continual champion of Catholic education and Catholic school teachers: “In order that the Catholic school and the Catholic teachers may truly make their irreplaceable contribution to the Church and to the world, the goal of Catholic education itself must be crystal clear. Beloved sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, brothers and sisters in the faith: Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others.”

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