

Education Sunday 2016

‘All are welcome’

Resources for Prayer & Reflection



*“May the church be the place of God’s mercy and love, where everyone can feel themselves welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live according to the good life of the Gospel. And in order to make others feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged, the church must have open doors so that all might enter. And we must go out of those doors and proclaim the Gospel.”*

Pope Francis, 2013



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## Introduction

Education Sunday is a day of celebration for all those involved in the world of education. For over a century it has been part of an ecumenical celebration in which the Catholic Church participates, and this year for the first time it falls at the start of the academic year. Reflecting on this week's readings, the theme for Education Sunday 2016 is "All are welcome".

Education Sunday is an opportunity for schools and parishes to come together to celebrate and give thanks for all the students, teachers, support staff and volunteers who work so hard in and for Catholic schools. It is also a chance for us all to remember that our churches and schools must have open doors to all, and that we must go out of those doors to meet all with Christ's love.

## Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic Church has always had radical social teaching, the earliest source being the Bible. There are many accounts of Jesus challenging the existing norms and values of the first century by welcoming everyone into his flock, men and women, tax collectors and fishermen.

In more recent times, the Church has developed Catholic Social Teaching in response to injustices in society from the Industrial Revolution to climate change and the many challenges facing the modern family. An evergrowing body of teaching produced after reflecting in prayer and on practice, CST offers a number of ways to reflect on how our Catholic faith informs our daily lives.

It is helpful to use CST to contextualise the theme “All are welcome” in the lives of our schools and parishes.

CST is based around six primary themes:

Human dignity  
Community and participation  
Care for creation  
Dignity in work  
Peace and reconciliation  
Solidarity

The next two reflections draw on CST to think about this year’s theme for Education Sunday, ‘All are welcome’.

## Reflection: 'All are welcome' in our schools

We are not created by God to live in isolation. Through our church and school communities, we share a network of relationships and experiences which find fullest expression in communion - God's gift to all of us. It is vital that we welcome and value every person in our community as an end in themselves, and part of God's plan for the world. Indeed, in Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, he says "Just as each of our bodies has several parts and each part has a separate function, so all of us, in union with Christ, form one body, and as parts of it we belong to each other."

*In the life of my school, do I appreciate the importance of every part of my school community?*

Saint Paul's message is as relevant to us today as it was to the Romans in the first century. Part of celebrating the many parts of our school community is recognising the gifts and talents we ourselves have been given by God. Our gifts are many and varied. Perhaps you are particularly good at listening to a friend having a hard day, or remembering to say hello to strangers visiting the school.

*What are my God-given gifts?*

By valuing and using our own gifts in God's service, we can see and appreciate other people's talents in the world around us and invite them to use them for the common good. Building up community life is an important value in CST. Many of us practice it every day in our schools. Through our work and study, the Church teaches that the 'fruits of work offer occasions for exchange, relationship and encounter'. Education is a crucial point of encounter for all of us, as through learning and praying together, we come to understand and rejoice in the diversity and difference in our schools, and in the world.

*How have I learnt about God's creation at school?*

## Reflection: 'All are welcome' in our churches

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis invites everyone to rejoice in the mercy of God revealed to us in the face of his son Jesus. Many schools have holy doors which the whole community can pass through, and every cathedral has a specially chosen holy door. The holy door stand as a reminder of God's forgiveness of all sins. During this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis challenges us all not only to open the doors of our churches, but to fling wide the doors of our hearts.

*How can I better radiate and reflect the tender love of God in the world?*

As well as building our communities from within, Pope Francis calls us all to go out into our communities 'in search of the lost sheep'. In this Sunday's gospel reading, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Shepherd seeking out the one sheep of 100 which has strayed away from the flock. Jesus asks the pharisees and the sinners, 'What man amongst you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it.' Jesus rejoices when we return to him, just as the Good Shepherd rejoices on finding the lost sheep.

*How can I be more like the Good Shepherd and bring strangers into the loving heart of God?*

At the heart of the Christian faith is the call to recognise God in the face of the stranger. 'Everyone must consider their every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all his or her life and the means necessary to living it with dignity' (Gaudium et Spes, paragraph 29). Just as everyone is called to be educated, so we must recognise the dignity of each person. In this Year of Mercy, 'mercy' and 'forgiveness' cannot remain merely beautiful words.

*How do we radiate God's love in our churches and schools? Are our doors and hearts truly open to all?*

Icon: Christ the Good Shepherd with the Lost Sheep



We all come to God through prayer in different ways. Some find icons helpful in leading them into prayer. This icon depicts Christ the Good Shepherd from this week's Gospel. His embrace of the lost sheep and open gaze at the viewer invite us to reflect on how God is searching to show his love in our lives, in our schools and parishes.



## Ideas for assemblies

In this week's gospel (Luke 15:1-32), Jesus teaches the parable of the Good Shepherd who never gives up on a single sheep, even when they have strayed a long way away from the flock. We are all welcomed with open arms into God's house, but when do we ourselves exclude someone because they don't like the same things as us, or don't act in a way that we understand? Watch this Pixar video, 'For the birds', and think about how the birds behave towards the new bird.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkFuvTHaMUE>



- What are the birds like? What do they do when other birds start arriving?
- How do they treat the new bird when it arrives? Do they welcome it? What did the new bird want?
- The first birds laugh and then want the new bird to leave, so they peck him violently. The cable throws them up in the air as the new bird falls off. Is it fun to see how the other birds fall and the different bird laughs? I'm sure we all laughed at it, but... it is the best ending?
- When we meet someone who is very different to us, how do we react? Do we welcome them? Have we had situations similar to the one in the cartoon?
- What does the Parable of the Good Shepherd teach us about welcoming people?

## St Thomas Aquinas (1226-1274)

St Thomas Aquinas lived during the thirteenth century in Italy. Although his feast day is on 28th January, he is an important saint on Education Sunday and at the start of the academic years as he is the patron saint of students.

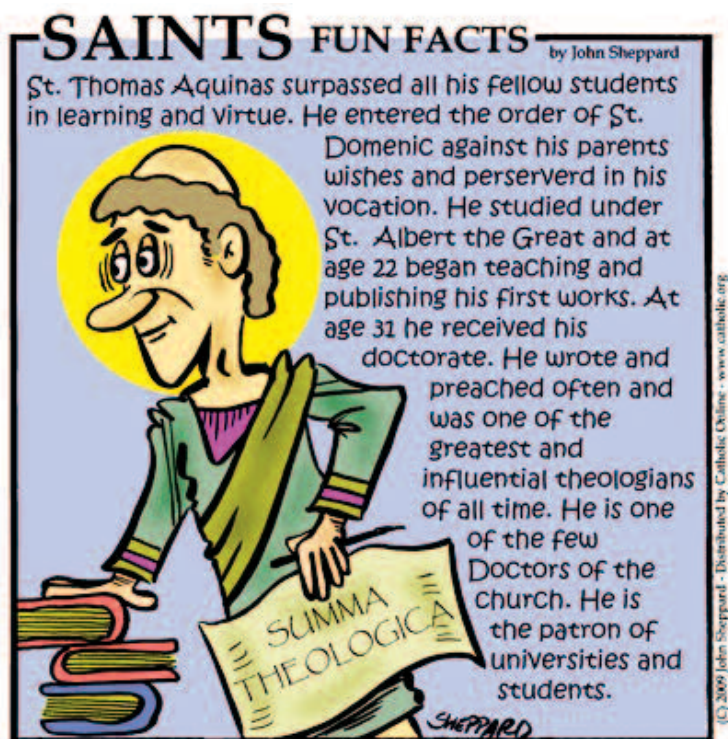
When he was five, Thomas was sent by his wealthy family to a Benedictine monastery in the hopes he would one day be abbot. Later, he studied at the University of Naples, where he first encountered the Dominicans. Although Thomas was impressed by their life of prayer and study, his family did not want him to join the order of poor friars, and so kidnapped and imprisoned him for over a year. They tested his resolve in many ways during this time, but eventually they let him go and he joined the Dominicans in 1244.

When Thomas was studying with the Dominicans, he was very quiet and was nicknamed 'the dumb ox' by his classmates. His teacher stood up for him, saying, 'You call him the dumb ox, but in his teaching he will one day produce such a bellowing that it will be heard throughout the world.' Thomas went on to be an immensely influential philosopher and theologian, and was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius V in 1567.



Here is St Thomas Aquinas' prayer for all students:

Come, Holy Spirit, Divine Creator, true source of light and fountain of wisdom! Pour forth your brilliance upon my dense intellect, dissipate the darkness which covers me, that of sin and of ignorance. Grant me a penetrating mind to understand, a retentive memory, method and ease in learning, the lucidity to comprehend, and abundant grace in expressing myself. Guide the beginning of my work, direct its progress, and bring it to successful completion. This I ask through Jesus Christ, true God and true man, living and reigning with You and the Father, forever and ever.  
Amen.



## Praying the Angelus for students

In praying the Angelus, we are reminded of the willingness with which Mary heard God and accepted God's will. He had chosen her as the Mother of Christ, and she was willing to trust Him with humility and sincerity.

Mary's story reminds us that God has given us each special gifts which we must neither neglect nor ignore. Following Mary's example, we too must be open to hearing and learning from God as a teacher and guide, and in turn show the utmost respect for our educators who strive to help us fulfil our potential and act with a spirit of sincere kindness, humility and respect towards others.

### The Angelus

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.

R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.  
Hail Mary, full of grace..

V. Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

R. Be it done unto me according to thy word.  
Hail Mary...

V. And the Word was made Flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.  
Hail Mary...

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts, that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ Thy Son was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

## Reflections for teachers and staff

As teachers and staff we are called to set an example of God's love through educating and guiding those in our care. Help us to continue to be open to learning and knowledge throughout our lives, and to teach others with patience, love and respect. The following prayers and reflections can be prayed in assembly, the staff room, or at any point when we may need strength throughout the school year. The prayer of St Francis is particularly fitting for teachers, as it describes the graces every teacher needs to serve their students.

### Prayer of St Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
Where there is injury, pardon;  
Where there is doubt, faith;  
Where there is despair, hope;  
Where there is darkness, light;  
Where there is sadness, joy.  
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

### Pray as you go

Schools are always busy places and it can sometimes be hard to find the time and space to say a prayer. Try the 'Pray As You Go' app for a short reflection on the day's readings:

<http://pray-as-you-go.org/70/>

## For staff and students

At the start of the academic year, it is often helpful to think about God's particular purpose for each of us. Blessed John Henry Newman wrote the prayer below, which many people pray when looking to the future.

### The mission of my Life

*Pray the following meditation slowly and intentionally, contemplating God's purpose for you today:*

God has created me to do Him some definite service.  
He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission.  
I may never know it in this life,  
but I shall be told it in the next.  
I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection  
between persons. He has not created me for naught.  
I shall do good; I shall do His work.  
I shall be an angel of peace,  
a preacher of truth in my own place,  
while not intending it if I do  
but keep His commandments.  
Therefore, I will trust Him,  
whatever I am, I can never be thrown away.  
If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him,  
in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.  
If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.  
He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about.  
He may take away my friends.  
He may throw me among strangers.  
He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide  
my future from me.  
Still, He knows what He is about.

Blessed John Henry Newman (1801-1890)

## Prayer for the Community - Bread of Tomorrow

O God, the source of our common life,  
when we are dry and scattered,  
when divided and alone,  
we long for connection, we long for community.

Breath of God, breathe on us.

With those we live beside,  
who are often strange to us,  
whom we may be afraid to approach,  
yet who have riches of friendship to share,  
we long for connection, we long for community.

Breath of God, breathe on us.

With those we have only heard of,  
who see with different eyes,  
whose struggles we try to imagine,  
whose fierce joy we wish we could grasp,  
we long for connection, we long for community.

Breath of God, breathe on us.

With those we shall never know,  
but whose lives are linked with ours,  
whose shared ground we stand on,  
and whose common air we breathe,  
we long for connection, we long for community.

Breath of God, breathe on us.

When we are dry and scattered,  
when we are divided and alone,  
when we are cut off from the source of our life,  
open our graves, O God,  
that all your people  
may be free to breathe, strong to move,  
and joyful to stand together  
to celebrate your name.

Amen.

*Janet Morley, "Bread of Tomorrow" livesimply Anthology, a CAFOD resource, edited by Annabel Shilson-Thomas.*

## Useful Links

Catholic Education Service  
[www.catholiceducation.org.uk](http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk)

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
[www.catholic-ew.org.uk](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk)  
[www.cbcew.org.uk](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)

The Vatican  
[www.w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html](http://www.w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html)

Catholic Social Teaching  
[www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk](http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk)

Wednesday Word  
[www.wednesdayword.org](http://www.wednesdayword.org)

The Jesuit Institute  
[www.jesuitinstitute.org](http://www.jesuitinstitute.org)

Pray as you go for students  
<http://pray-as-you-go.org/131/>

Pray as you go for adults  
<http://pray-as-you-go.org/70/>

