

**Homily – Friday of the Third Week of Easter
Catholic Schools Leadership Awards – May 6, 2022**

Saul was a fervent defender of the teachings he had received about the identity of his nation. He fought the Church because he thought Christians were destroying the foundations of his country. He did not understand that Jesus is actually the glory of the people of Israel, the overwhelming fulfillment of its ultimate hope. Saul knew about Jesus, but he had not had an encounter with the living Word. For that reason, he was unable to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

In the first reading, we heard what happened after “a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice” addressing him. Jesus does not blame him for persecuting the Church, but himself. There is no separation between Jesus and the Church. The Lord said to him, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go...” At once, he did as he was told by the one he had been persecuting. Ananias was shocked too, when he received the instruction from Jesus to go and meet with Saul. He had good reasons to fear, but he also trusted the Lord and did as he was told. No matter how close we may think we are to Jesus, we are always in need of conversion.

When Saul learned that Jesus is the Son of God, and he could not keep the news to himself. After the time it took Saul to recover and to learn more about the Good News, he began to teach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

In the gospel reading, we heard the second part of a memorable teaching of Jesus on the “Bread of Life”. His listeners were scandalized. Rather than explaining what he meant when he referred to his Flesh and Blood as food and drink, he talks about the effects of such food and such

drink. Christians – like Mary in her Magnificat – can proclaim that the Lord has done wonders for all of us. Anticipating what he is going to do at the Last Supper, he assures us that his flesh is true food and his blood is true drink. “Whoever eats this bread will live forever”.

Jesus, who is Love and can only love, knows that the one who loves feels the need to love in return. The Eucharist is clear proof of how much Jesus loves us out of his love for the Father. This assembly – representing the whole Church – makes visible the mystery that makes us the Body of Christ. God’s very nature is to be “Gift-of-Self”. He blesses us, in order to bless others through us. The experience of God’s love is what moves us to reciprocate by loving Him with all our hearts. And his love enables us to love others, including our Catholic School students and families.

Pope Francis recently said that “In an age awash in information, often transmitted without wisdom or critical sense, the task of forming present and future generations of Catholic teachers and students remains as important as ever. As educators, you are called to nurture the desire for truth, goodness and beauty that lies in the heart of each individual, so that all may learn how to love life and be open to the fullness of life.”

The leadership awards that are given today must follow the model of the Eucharist. The Bread of Life is not an award for the saints, but rather food and a gift, which enables those who receive it to be themselves food and a gift, which is given to others through loving service. These awards are a testimony of the Lord, who invites us to conversion, so that everything that is taught in Catholic schools is intimately united to the living Word who gives life its true meaning.

Blessed Mother of Guadalupe, we entrust our Catholic schools to your motherly protection.