



# Seton Home Study School

Volume XXI, Number 7



*“Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”*



July 2004

## *Our Lady of Mount Carmel*

We celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel on July 16<sup>th</sup>, the date of Our Lady’s appearance to St. Simon Stock. The celebration of this feast seems particularly appropriate in light of the current conflict between Muslims and Christians. This feast gives us and our children an opportunity to learn about how the Church has suffered from those who oppose us. Our children can be prayer “crusaders” in their own home.

Mount Carmel was the location in Palestine where, in the Old Testament times, the Prophet Elias called down fire from heaven, once to destroy an enemy pagan captain and his fifty soldiers, and once to prove to the pagan priests that the true God of the Israelites was in control. The Prophet Elias lived on Mount Carmel most of his life as a monk; it was because he lived there with other monks living a life of prayer and sacrifice, that Mount Carmel was considered a sacred mountain.

Later during the Old Testament time of Judith, King Nabuchodonosor sent his general to “bring all the earth under his empire.” One of the places that resisted this invasion was Carmel. Although Judith did not live in Carmel, she was an Israelite widow who prayed for God to give her the strength to defeat the king and his general, General Holofernes. Judith was given a strategy by God, and she killed the general in his own camp.

In New Testament times, chapels, including one to the Blessed Mother, were built on Mount Carmel, and an order of monks called Carmelites lived there. Throughout the centuries when the followers of Islam, the Mohammedans

or the Saracens, were destroying Christian cities and churches, Carmel was destroyed but rebuilt again by the Christians. The Crusaders fought valiantly during the holy wars trying to save Carmel and the other holy lands.

However, because of the devastation, the Carmelite Order moved to Europe. Later, St. Simon Stock, born in England in the mid 1100’s, joined the Carmelite Order in England, where there was great devotion to the Blessed Mother. He became the general of the Carmelite Order, and spent several years in the monastery on Mount Carmel. The Order spread through Europe, and in 1252 the pope gave official recognition to the Carmelite Order.

The Blessed Mother appeared to St. Simon Stock on July 16, 1251, in Kent, England, and gave him a scapular for the monks to wear day and night. She told the saint, “Those wearing this scapular shall not suffer eternal fire.”

Since then, the Brown Scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel has become a favorite with Catholics all over the world, many popes and saints wearing it daily. Scapulars, official sacramentals of the Church, with their prayers and devotions, have become second in popularity only to the Rosary. The Church has granted many spiritual benefits to the wearing of the Brown Scapular.

St. Terese of Lisieux, the Little Flower and Doctor of the Church who joined the Carmelite Order, wrote about Mary as our Mother and a model for us to imitate. Mary cares for us as a mother, and we should love her as our heavenly mother. We need to look to her as the perfect disciple of Jesus, and try to imitate her way

of life, especially her instant and complete obedience to His holy will.

Those who wear the scapular show their devotion to the Mother of God by frequent prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments. The scapular is a sign, a symbol of our willingness to commit ourselves to a higher spiritual life of prayer and devotion, as well as the practice of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

For us homeschooling parents, Our Lady of Mount Carmel should remind us of the attacks against the church, whether they are from across the seas or right in our own country. We and our children need to re-dedicate ourselves to praying for the Church, and to ask the Blessed Mother in prayer to help our Church at this time in our country when it is under attack from the pagan society, from the media, and even from those supposedly within the Church who want the laws of God abandoned.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we know you are our heavenly mother and are dedicated to protecting us. Please intercede for us with your Son to protect our Church from the enemies of your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to learn through teaching our children that our holy Catholic Faith is the most precious treasure we have, and that we must be willing to make great sacrifices for the Church which your Son founded for our eternal salvation. Amen.

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## *Questions We Are Asked*

*by Dr. Mary Kay Clark  
Director, Seton Home Study School*

### **What are my options for sending papers for grading?**

Parents can send tests and papers for grading in a variety of ways. They may be sent over the Internet to our web site, and they arrive in a matter of seconds. This is simply a matter of logging on My Seton at [www.setonhome.org/myseton](http://www.setonhome.org/myseton), then clicking on "Courses." The courses in which the student is enrolled will appear in a box, along with icons to the right. The icon with the hand and the red cuff will read, "Send (upload) work to Seton." After clicking on the icon, the parent can then choose the correct quarter and assignment, and then submit the test or paper.

Once these tests arrive at Seton, our online graders can click into the holding bin and grade the tests as they come in. When they finish, the test with the grader's comments is available online.

Many tests, especially in high school, can be taken online. The objective tests are then immediately graded and recorded, giving the student instant feedback.

The number of tests and other assignments coming in online is growing rapidly, more than four thousand a month currently. The students and parents like to know as soon as possible how they are progressing. In addition, the individual assignments—tests or book reports or paragraphs—can be sent as they are done, which gives quick feedback to the students. They do not need to wait for all the nine-week assignments to be done before sending in their work.

Some parents like to send tests and papers to us by fax, but sometimes we are not able to read these, and sometimes all the pages do not come through. Still, this is a good option when you need the

work to reach Seton quickly and you can't upload the work online. Our fax number is 540-636-1602.

The majority of the tests and papers are still sent to us by mail. When you send work by mail, be sure to put a student label on the work, or at least write the student name and number on the work. Also, you should be sure to make copies of what you send, because things can be lost in the mail.

### **I'd like to have my child take tests on the Internet, but my child is only in second grade.**

In the very early grades, we do not have tests that can be taken online. However, if you have a scanner, you can scan your child's papers into the computer, and then it will be easy to send the papers over the Internet. We have more information about how to scan and send work over the Internet at this address: [www.setonhome.org/myseton/scanning.php](http://www.setonhome.org/myseton/scanning.php)

Starting in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, we have put most elementary tests on our web site for students to fill in the answers in the boxes provided. These are still graded by our graders.

When taking online tests, please be aware that the online computer-graded tests are not always identical to the paper copies, primarily because the formatting is different.

With teachers able to grade over the Internet, we are not forced to limit our graders to the Front Royal area. This gives us access to a wider range of highly qualified people to grade our student papers. One of our online graders lives in Dallas, another in Minneapolis, and three in northern Virginia.

**It has been a difficult year because my husband does not help me at all.**

Some husbands believe that the home schooling is the job his wife has taken on herself. These husbands believe that they do their job at work and she should do her job at home, whatever that entails.

It takes a certain kind of spiritual growth for husbands to realize that the children are to be raised by both parents. In many families in the recent past, and even at the present time, children were sent to school where parents thought the children were being educated as well as fed a meal, have some recreation and sports, and other extra-curricular activities. Families have leaned heavily on the school to raise their children. Even many Catholic families trusted the parochial school to teach and to train the children, and did not take a very active role in education.

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We cannot be surprised by parents who do not think they should be very much involved with the raising and training of their children. However, mothers need to understand that not only is this a moral obligation on the part of both parents, parents are not really fulfilled as parents unless they participate in the upbringing of their children. Fathers can not reach the same level of happiness in this world if they miss out on these precious experiences with their children.

Don't give up. While your husband may not realize it now, he will be grateful later when he becomes involved

more with the children. Start out slowly, asking him to help a little bit perhaps on Saturday morning with a science activity. Perhaps he could take the children to an historical museum and to the library to look for books for a history assignment.

**I am about ready to give up. I just cannot make my children obey me.**

Many parents feel guilty about disciplining their children. It is not popular these days to say “no” or to spank a child who has been purposefully naughty. Many moms think *they* have failed and don’t consider the child to be at fault. Some mothers think they are committing a sin if they become angry or yell at their child.

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I know one story about a mother who told her daughter to stay inside the house while she cut the lawn. The little girl ran outside the house in spite of her mother’s command, and ended up getting in a very serious accident. The little girl has grown up disabled because of that seemingly small act of disobedience.

If we do not discipline our children so they learn to obey quickly, they not only can get hurt physically, they can get hurt emotionally and spiritually, and perhaps suffer the consequences for a lifetime, or longer. If your children will not obey you when you tell them to do their schoolwork, they probably won’t obey you when you tell them not to touch that hot stove or not to cross that dangerous street.

Lately, we have been seeing many young men returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The one obvious quality which is easy to see in them is self-discipline. These young men have been severely disciplined in the military, yet are happy and in control of their lives. While the self-discipline was necessary to stay alive in the war zone, self-discipline is necessary to survive in our pagan society which screeches its message in all the media. The American society itself has become a war zone for Christians.

The young soldiers returning from the battlefield or other military positions have learned to control their speech and their movements, their studies, and even their fun time. If we do not teach our children to learn to obey quickly like little Christian soldiers, they will always be at the mercy of their emotional whims of the moment. They will not be happy.

Genuine parental love takes time and effort. Genuine parental love is tough for the sake of the life of the child. It takes determination and perseverance, over a number of years, but the goals are well worth the sacrifice.

Our Seton SEM department sells a book called *Upbringing* by James Stenson. He writes that parents must work at the job of disciplining their children. It cannot be a casual hobby. Parents must work together as a team and support each other’s decisions. The parents must show respect for each other, must be self-disciplined themselves in the way they talk and act toward each other.

Parents must practice will-power and show their children that they are practicing will-power. Parents must deny themselves and help their children learn to deny themselves. Duty must be seen as more important than personal comfort. Give your children chores each day, and make them do them every day. It is not the chore that is important but the child’s learning about duty and responsibility. Even if you need to temporarily cut back on the homeschooling lessons, it will be worth it in the long run to train your children in self-discipline so that you

can teach your children in the academics.

If you stop homeschooling because your child is disobedient, it won’t help the child learn obedience. It will just mean there is one more disobedient child in school.

**Is Seton a college prep program?**

It is our goal to offer a program that prepares a student for the challenges of college, or for life in general. Our high school courses try to make students focus and think in depth. This is good preparation not only for college, but for anyone who intends to be an educated person.

The most important point for high school students is to work diligently in their courses and not put off assignments or waste a lot of time. One difficulty is that students put off doing their work every day, and then by the end of the week, or after two or three weeks, it is hard to catch up. If the work is done daily, students can keep up.

This year, we started “Directed” courses on our website. This means that high school students can listen to a weekly tutoring session for their weekly assignments. The directed courses start on a specific day and finish on a specific day. The hope is that students can keep on track, keep up their weekly pace, by tuning in to the weekly lectures. They can be heard on our My Seton web site at [www.setonhome.org/myseton](http://www.setonhome.org/myseton).

Seton definitely has a high school program to help students do well in college. The reading, writing, and thinking demanded will help students to be excellent students in college. However, this kind of education is the normal education which was expected in all Catholic schools in the past. But today there are so many distractions, so many other activities available, that students find it difficult to stay focused. Parents need to help their children to realize that during these growing up years, next to their spiritual life and religious activities, their education is of primary importance.

If your children have specific problems, please call a Seton counselor for help.

## *The Eucharist: Model for Family Life*

*by Fr. Paul Scalia*

*Editor's Note: In June, 2003, at the Immaculate Heart of Mary conference near Washington, D.C., Father Paul Scalia gave a talk on The Eucharist as a Model for Family Life. The following are some highlights from that talk.*

Priests are told by their bishop at the time of their ordination that they are to "imitate the Mystery you celebrate." The priest is to imitate what he makes present on the altar. Grace works in our souls when we receive Christ in the Eucharist. By grace, if we imitate the Eucharist, imitate Christ in the Eucharist, we can be transformed. We are not only to receive the Eucharist, we are to imitate the Eucharist. Everyone who receives Christ in the Eucharist should imitate Christ in their family life, in their homes. What instruction does the Eucharist give us for family life?

The Eucharist is the sacrament of Sacrifice, Presence, and Communion. These three aspects of the Eucharist instruct the family. The Eucharist instructs us in the practice of the three evangelical counsels. Sacrifice teaches poverty, Presence teaches chastity, and Communion teaches obedience. The Eucharist enables us to live the three evangelical counsels by teaching us how to learn from the Eucharist what Christ desires for us to accomplish.

The Sacrifice of the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of the Mass, is the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. St. Paul connects the Eucharist, and the sacrifice of Our Lord on the Cross, and the continuation of His sacrifice in the Mass. St. Augustine teaches [that] on the altar Christ is present and slain and sacrificed. The Mass is a true Sacrifice. Christ Himself consecrates and offers the sacrifice. Christ Himself offers every Mass, which is why the priest is another Christ. The sacrifice that He offers is the sacrifice of Himself.

The Sacrifice of Christ corresponds to the evangelical counsel of poverty. Christ displays a certain poverty by

coming down to His creatures in the form of bread and wine. Poverty is not just an absence of created goods. Poverty is a detachment from earthly things.

Poverty is necessary in the family. Poverty, that is a spirit of detachment from created goods, should be practiced in the family. The family must teach poverty which can be learned from the Eucharist. Family members need to detach themselves from the greed of our culture, from the constant drive to have more goods. Poverty has a spiritual significance. Parents must make a deliberate effort to cultivate a spirit of poverty.

Parents have a natural instinct to provide for their children, but the evil one can turn that good instinct to damage the child's spiritual life if too much is provided for a child. It is better for a child's soul to go without some temporal things. Be temperate in providing for children. One of the first things that parents must teach is detachment. Children must be taught to sacrifice for their moral foundation. A basic principle of the spiritual life is the ability to go without.

Sometimes when children go astray, parents wonder why when they say, "But we gave him everything he wanted." But that is the reason children go astray, if they never had a chance to sacrifice, to do without. Parents need to develop in their children the spirit of poverty, detachment from things, to form their spiritual life. Teach your children to deny themselves. Christ said, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his Cross, and follow Me." Self-denial is learned by poverty. Our Lord makes Himself poor in the Eucharist to make us rich. We need to teach our children to go without in order to make others rich.

The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Presence. Christ is truly and really present to us, His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. His Presence teaches us reverence and, consequently, chastity. Christ is truly Present but he is veiled under the appearance of bread and wine.

He is there, truly present to hear us, to listen to us, to know us, to love us, to answer us. The real Presence of Our Lord teaches us that we should reverence the Eucharist, as it is God Himself Present.

In addition, Christ shows reverence for us by coming to us veiled in the form of bread and wine so as not to overwhelm us. Our Lord shows reverence for us as He veils Himself so that we can approach Him.

We show reverence for Christ in the Eucharist when we bow and kneel and genuflect, and make the Sign of the Cross. This reminds us of the necessity of reverence for Christ. When we lose sight of reverence for Christ, we blunder into the church and lose sight of Who He Is. We need to display reverence in church. The Mass and the Eucharist is the school for reverence.

Family members should learn from the reverence we practice in church to have reverence for each family member. The reverence that Christ displays to us, and the reverence that we show Him in church should be brought into the home and the family. Reverence is the ability to recognize the value of everything and of everyone.

Our culture is so opposed to reverence, it is a display of the antithesis of reverence. There is no reverence shown for others in our culture. Reverence is a recognition of God as our Creator and of His people created by Him. We should show reverence to all of God's creation, but especially to other people.

Irreverence is shown by people by the sin of pride, when people in positions of authority "lord it over others." Irreverence is also shown to others by the sin of concupiscence, that is, a manipulation for one's own pleasure, a desire to use others to suit one's own desires. Family members need to show reverence for each other, not to try to control others for their own desires.

Family members should learn from the Eucharist and the real Presence to be truly present themselves in their own homes. Keep faithful to the family dinner. Family members need to be

physically present, but also mentally present in their home. To show reverence for each other, members of the family should not be occupied for long times on the phone, playing computer games, or watching television. These are threats to the unity of the family.

Reverence for each other begins with courtesy and good manners. If parents practice good manners and courtesy toward each other, the children will show reverence toward each other. Spouses should show reverence to each other. Reverence leads to chastity. If we show reverence for other people, if we respect our own bodies and have reverence for the souls of others, we can reduce the temptations against chastity. Reverence is the ability to allow the mystery to remain a mystery. Reverence is the first step toward chastity.

The Eucharist is also the sacrament of Communion. The Eucharist unites us with Our Lord in Holy Communion. We are commanded by God, as the Israelites of the Old Testament, to eat the flesh of the Paschal Lamb. Our Lord has commanded us to receive Him in the Holy Eucharist, to do this in memory of Him, therefore we must obey Him. Thus the Holy Eucharist establishes obedience to Christ, the third evangelical counsel.

At the Last Supper when Christ instituted the Eucharist, He spoke so strongly about His commandments. "If you love Me, keep my commandments." "You are My friends if you do what I command you." His instructions at the Last Supper are full of commands for our obedience.

We can see the kind of obedience Christ requires when He says, "I am the vine and you are the branches; apart from Me, you can do nothing." The obedience that Christ desires is the obedience that Holy Communion should bring about within our souls. This is the obedience of the branches to the vine, and that obedience is not just a matter of the vine commanding and the branches just obeying. It is far more intimate than that. The branches actually have the life in the vine within them.

Receiving Holy Communion is an interior form of obedience, not just an external form. Christ is not just standing apart and commanding us, but Our Lord is coming in, uniting Himself with us as a vine to the branches, so that we may be obedient, so that we can be obedient.

The kind of obedience Our Lord desires is not domination by Him. It is an obedience born of union, of Communion.

This is the kind of obedience that should characterize the family. Parents who do not discipline their children will find their children will never learn to be obedient. The first step to the interior kind of obedience is the external form, discipline. The goal of discipline and obedience in a household should be the same as Holy Communion, that is to set within the child the principle and the ability to obey. The task of the parent is to form the will of the child, somehow get within the child to form that child from within, so the child will desire

and be able to obey. That is what Our Lord desires to accomplish in you, to form you from within, so that you will be able to obey because you will desire to obey.

Parents need to strive to form the will of their children so that they have an internal desire to obey. This internal desire to obey encourages them to want to be obedient to the commands of God. Train your children to be obedient in such a way that your children want to be generous in their obedience to God. If your children seek to do the will of God, they will do great things.

Sacrifice, Presence, and Communion, — poverty, chastity, and obedience, — this is what the Eucharist teaches us, this is what the Eucharist should form within us. As a family, you should receive the Eucharist together and worship Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament together. Allow Him to form you from within, allow His grace to find its way into your soul and also to imitate the Mystery you worship.

### *Letter from a Seton Parent*

I just want to tell you how much we appreciate your home study program. My daughter was a junior in a local Catholic high school. She was a very unhappy young lady. Her grades were appalling and her attitude toward us, her parents, was just as bad.

Homeschooling was the smartest thing we have ever done in our lives. In the beginning, she and I were like "two cats in a bag," to quote my husband, but slowly we developed a relationship that was pleasing to both of us. She has shown me in many ways how much she appreciates the time I have spent helping her to complete her high school education. We did not always attend to our studies like we should have, but we did spend time doing things together, and that was a wonder in itself.

I never spent much time studying when I was in high school because grades were easy for me, but it is

amazing what I myself have learned through homeschooling. The hardest thing for me to hear from my daughter was that she had learned more about her Catholic Faith from Seton than from her eleven years in Catholic schools. I grew up studying my religion from the Baltimore Catechism series, and it never occurred to me that her religious training was anything less. That puts the responsibility on my shoulders as well as the schools'.

My daughter works at a grocery store near our home and is in charge of the cashiers and sackers on her shift. She is greatly respected by the management and the employees. She was not that comfortable with people until she started homeschooling. She is jokingly referred to as the Homeschool Poster Child at work. When customers find out she is homeschooled, they always say that explains why she is such a wonderful teenager.

## *The Role of Themes in Great Literature*

One of the things we try to do at Seton is to help students to think critically and to analyze what they read. That is why we think the reading assignments and the book reports are so important. Reading, thinking, and writing skills are critical for our students to survive as Catholics in a secular society where few read and thus few learn from the past experience of others. Very little logical thinking exists in the public square, or in the media, and very little writing is being done which is even readable or understandable. Seton's curriculum includes works of literature that are not only well-written, but have something important to say.

People often wonder why fiction should be an important part of their education, thinking it is something they do not have time for. It is true that there are many practical things we must read and devote our time to. In our busy lifestyle, we don't want to sit down and read a "story." But is fiction a waste of time? Consider that Jesus taught us truths through His parables, which are *fictional* stories to teach universal truths. Jesus taught us that He loves us and that His Father in Heaven loves us. However, that truth becomes very clear in a practical way in a fictional story. He told us a story about a father with a son who left him, took his inheritance, wasted his money and lived a life of sin. After finally becoming sorry for his sin, the son returned to his father, and fell before him in contrition. The father picked up his son, gave him the ring on his finger, killed the fatted calf, and called all his friends together to celebrate the return of his son. Certainly, this story is worth our time and consideration.

The truth is that Jesus told a fictional story. This is not a story about an actual man whose son squandered his inheritance and lived and ate among the pigs. This is a fictional story which Jesus told to give a vivid example of the deep and never-ending love that God our Father has for all of us sinners. Our Father rejoices when we are sorry for our sins and confess them, and will give us the reward of a heavenly banquet.

A great story is really a concrete illustration of a truth that can be discovered in reality. This universally applicable, yet tangible, truth is a theme. Can any of us ever forget the story of the Good Samaritan? This was a fictional story Jesus told to teach us a truth. Telling the details of the story is the plot. The theme of the story is the message presented, which might be: *To love one's neighbor involves selfless acts of compassion to even the least among men.* Jesus told the story to answer a question in a concrete way. Jesus wanted to illustrate the truth of loving one's neighbor and told this story in response to the question, "And who is my neighbor?" [Luke 10:29]. Rather than simply state his message, he told a story to illustrate his point, so that we might fully understand it.

A defining aspect of a great work of literature is its theme, which presents its meaning, central message, or insight. The theme in a story is an abstract idea or a truth that can be applied to life outside of the context of the story. A great fictional story contains a theme which presents a specific insight that is worthwhile. A story will often have minor themes in addition to its main theme. In our assignments, we ask you to find the *main* theme because it is the insight the author is first and foremost trying to convey. We often talk about the story of Cinderella in our lessons. The main theme relates to being obedient and patient in spite of adversities and hostility even from family members. The minor theme relates to the sisters whose reward for their spitefulness is not finding happiness but remaining perpetually selfish. The main theme will usually involve not only the main character, but the secondary characters as well. The story of Cinderella is a simpler one, since it is a fairy tale which usually appeals to a younger audience. The themes in the high school literature book analysis selections will often be more insightful or complex than these.

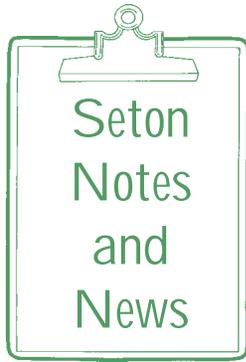
One way to help your children start to recognize themes in literature is to encourage your children to discuss with you a simple story from the elementary

grade level readers. Even for high school students, it would be good practice to study the simple stories first before tackling the more difficult stories or book reports assigned in high school. All of the stories in our Catholic readers have a solid message, which is often a moral lesson.

Though I have not read the story in a long time, I shall not forget the message of a story in one of our readers for young children. A little girl was invited to a party and was unhappy because she knew her friends were all getting new party dresses and her mother told her they did not have the money for her to have a new party dress. She went to the party very unhappy, but when she attended the party, all the girls in their new dresses did not want to play the party games because they were wearing their expensive new party dresses and could not get them messed up or dirty. The little girl in the story, though, was able to enjoy the party. The main theme of the story is that one does not need things to impress people to be happy.

Like most good stories, there are secondary themes in the story about the little girl and the party. A secondary theme is that parents often possess a valuable wisdom and know what is important in life. Another secondary theme involves not being overly influenced by unreliable peers who may have a false idea about what is important.

While a theme is a general statement of a truth, we need to make sure that it is not a statement that can be applied to any story. When we think about the story of the Prodigal Son, the main theme is not "All parents love their children," or "The grass is not always greener on the other side." These are both are too general and abbreviated and the latter is a cliché that is too obviously true. Neither should the theme merely describe the story, such as "Whenever a son goes off and wastes his inheritance, if he is sorry later, his father will welcome him home." This would be too specific to be applicable to other circumstances in life. The theme would be better expressed as: *Man's offenses may be forgiven as long he expresses sorrow, sincere repentance and*



## Conferences

Many state and local groups are now sponsoring their own conferences, inviting various Catholic vendors and curriculum providers. Seton is happy to participate at these conferences as a vendor. For more information, contact Mary Lou Warren at 540-636-9990.

**Lafayette, LA. July 10, 2004.** Third Annual Homeschool Conference at the Petroleum Club of Lafayette, 111 Heymann Blvd. For information, call Julie at 337-873-7547.

**Wichita, KS. August 6-8, 2004.** Midwest Catholic Family Conference at the Century II Convention Center, 225 W. Douglas Ave. For information, call 316-618-9787 or email [midconf@cox.net](mailto:midconf@cox.net).

**Anaheim, CA. August 20-22, 2004.** 14th Annual Catholic Family Conference at the Anaheim Convention Center. For information, call 877-526-2151, or [www.catholicresourcecenter.org](http://www.catholicresourcecenter.org).

## Themes, cont'd from page 6

*resolves not to sin again.* After contemplating the plot and characters of the story we see that Jesus is teaching us not only the love of God for His children, but also the love parents have for their children. After we have contemplated the major components of the story and their implications, we can determine the main theme.

When students are asked to write a paragraph or an essay about the theme of a story, they are not only to identify the theme, but they must show by examples how their interpretation of the theme is correct. The student may be asked to give three or four examples of events or incidents in the story to prove their theme. They may find some comments by a character, or even by the author, which may be used to prove their statement of theme. The decisions a character makes often proves the theme, such as the vicar in *The Vicar of Wakefield* who constantly chooses the good no matter what the results. Often stories have a symbol of the theme, such as the red ferns in *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Make sure examples are not generalizations about the character's behavior, but rather describe their specific actions or words that support the theme. Further, all examples must be followed by an explanation of how it illustrates the theme you have asserted.

Theme is probably the most difficult part in the writing assignments we give

the students. It is easier to write about the characters or about the conflict. Theme, however, involves more thinking, more interpreting, more putting events together to come to a conclusion. The theme is also the most important part of a story. In a sense, a story often exists because the author wants us to understand the theme.

The purpose of finding themes in a fictional story, especially in parables told by Jesus, can help us learn truths in life which can be very practical in our own lives. There are other purposes, too, because the intellectual exercise develops necessary thinking and interpretation skills. Day after day, in the newspapers, on the television, or on the Internet, illogical thinking and untruths permeate the society. When reading anything, it is helpful to try to determine exactly what point the author is trying to convey. When you and your children start discussing themes in whatever you read, it will become very exciting and very rewarding.

## Prayer Request

As we go to press with this newsletter, our chaplain, Fr. Constantine, is having triple bypass heart surgery. Please pray for his swift recovery.

## The Seton Home Study Newsletter

is published monthly by  
Seton Home Study School  
1350 Progress Dr.

Front Royal, VA 22630  
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Subscription price for non-enrolled families is \$15 per year. Free online at [www.setonhome.org/archive/default.stm](http://www.setonhome.org/archive/default.stm)

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# *The Nature of Things*

*by Laura Clark*

God was never far from the mind of Elizabeth Ann Seton. In her appreciation of the created order, especially, she saw the handiwork of the Creator. The song of the thrush, the oak tree spreading its arms to the heavens in prayer, the gurgling brook chanting praises to its Source —Elizabeth saw the goodness of God in them all.

Elizabeth spent much of her childhood at Uncle William Bayley's seashore home in New Rochelle. Even as a small girl, Elizabeth had a keen appreciation of nature: "every little leaf or flower, or animal, insect, shades of clouds, or waving trees" became "objects of vacant, unconnected thoughts of God and heaven."

Summer is the season when nature is at her vibrant best. Most of the year's growth takes place in summer. Children have a vacation from school, and while plant life thrives, men's lives slow down. "Summertime, when the livin' is easy; fish are jumpin' and the cotton is high." Summer is an opportunity to take the time, alone, with the children, to renew our appreciation of nature.

Nature was given to us to enjoy — created to lead us to God. It cannot be an end in itself for it changes and will pass away. Nature's transitory pattern awakens our yearning for permanence, for the unchanging *Ever Present* Who is God. Her beauty teaches us much about God, and the admiration of nature can lead us to thoughts of heaven, as it did with Elizabeth.

Summer is a time of plenty — even the homeless have the comfort and warmth in the generous heat of summer. The season reminds us of God's graciousness, and that God is not stingy, but magnanimous. "I have come to give life, and to give it more abundantly," Christ said. At the wedding of Cana, He made wine for the guests, although many had probably already drunk their fill. He is a God who wants us to rejoice in the good things of the earth; and yet, we have only to look at the world's goods to realize that they receive all their attributes from God. They are limited, and they cannot sustain us. Only the Creator can fulfill the yearnings of our restless hearts.

And, in so many ways, nature mirrors our own souls. The winters, with their cold and dark nights, represent the times when we turned from grace and preferred darkness to light. The springs, with their promise of birth, represent the growing life of grace in our souls. The summers, the season of plenty, foreshadows a maturing of grace and love within us. The falls, with the temporary disappearance of life, reminds us that our natural lives will one day disappear also, to be replaced by the resplendence of the supernatural life which is all we can desire.

Elizabeth describes herself to be filled with "enthusiastic love to God and admiration of His works," when she looks at nature. Let us strive for both things — to love God above all, and to recognize and be grateful for all He has given us, throughout the summers and winters of our lives.

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