



Seton Home

Study School

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Mary, Gate of Heaven

When she was approached by the Archangel Gabriel, Mary agreed to be the Mother of God and thus became an instrument used by God the Father to bring His only begotten Son, Jesus, into the world to save the world. By his birth and suffering and dying on the Cross to redeem us, the Son of God opened the gates of heaven. His Mother Mary is referred to as the Gate of Heaven because her acceptance was the means by which the Son of God could become man.

But Mary is not a gate only in the sense of being the way through which God came down to earth. It is the nature of a gate to allow passage in both directions. So, as Mary was the Gate by which God became man, she is also the Gate which opens to Heaven for us.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God closed the Gates of Heaven, but Mary’s acceptance became the first step in opening the Gates. As the rejection of God by Eve had closed the Gates, the acceptance of God by Mary, the new Eve, opens the Gates.

In a classic book on the life of Mary, Abbé Orsini wrote, “Let us joyfully raise our eyes to the eternal paradise of pleasure. There we shall see not a cherub armed with a fiery sword, forbidding our approach as of old at the gate of Eden. But we shall have the consolation to see a Mother, the sweetest, the most tender, the most considerate of mothers, constantly watching us with eyes of love, as we wend our weary way through this same valley of tears once marked by her own blessed footsteps. We shall see her with her hands stretched out towards this place of exile and probation, inviting us to trust in her protection, and to do

violence to ourselves [deny ourselves pleasures] in order to gain that kingdom which the Blood of her Divine Son opened to our hopes and wishes.”

As mother of Jesus, and mother of us all, Mary occupies a singular place in the economy of salvation. Pope John Paul II wrote in *Redemptoris Mater*, “[Mary] puts herself ‘in the middle,’ that is to say she acts as a mediatrix not as an outsider, but in her position as mother. She knows that as such she can point out to her Son the needs of mankind, and in fact, she ‘has the right’ to do so. Her mediation is thus in the nature of intercession: Mary ‘intercedes’ for mankind. And that is not all. As a mother she also wishes the messianic power of her Son to be manifested, that salvific power of his which is meant to help man in his misfortunes, to free him from the evil which in various forms and degrees weighs heavily upon his life.”

Thus, it is fitting that at the wedding feast of Cana, it is through Mary’s concern for the wedding guests and families that Jesus’ power is first revealed publicly. We see in this episode two roles of Mary combined. First, she is the solicitous mother always sensitive to what people need. Second, she is the one who introduces the power of God to the world. Quoting again from *Redemptoris Mater*, “the description of the Cana event outlines what is actually manifested as a new kind of motherhood according to the spirit and not just according to the flesh, that is to say Mary’s solicitude for human beings, her coming to them in the wide variety of their wants and needs. At Cana in Galilee there is shown only one concrete aspect of human need, apparently a small one of

little importance (“They have no wine”). But it has a symbolic value: this coming to the aid of human needs means, at the same time, bringing those needs within the radius of Christ’s messianic mission and salvific power.”

Now in Heaven, Mary continues to be the Gate through which graces pass to us and our prayers pass to God. As she said to the wine-bearers at the wedding feast, so she says to us each day, “Do whatever He tells you.” She is our hope and inspiration, that we are destined for the glory which she already shares. As stated in *Lumen Gentium*, “the Mother of Jesus, in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise she shines forth on earth until the day of the Lord shall come, a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God.”

Blessed Virgin Mother, Gate of Heaven, help us home schooling parents to serve as little gates of heaven. Help us to teach our children the Catholic Faith, to be good examples for our children, so that we may give them the enlightenment and courage to be good Catholics and to obey the laws of God. Help us, Blessed Mary, Gate of Heaven, to provide our children with the Catholic education they need to enter through the Gate of Heaven. Holy Mary, Gate of Heaven, pray for us.

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Questions We Are Asked

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

This is my first year, and I am finding it difficult to be organized.

Probably the most difficult part of home schooling is re-organizing your lifestyle. You need to find a place for the children to do their schoolwork, and you need to find a quiet place for those who need quiet while they are working. In addition, you need to establish a firm schedule, not only for the home schooling work but also for the housework and meal planning. You need to become a strong supervisor of what is happening in your home.

You cannot let outside activities dominate and control your family life. Many mothers who have their children in schools allow the school activities to take over the family life, especially sports activities. This makes for constant disruption of family life. It also results in some kids not wanting to have an in-home family lifestyle, but rather a constant interest in being outside the house with other kids and outside activities. These kids develop a sort of frenzied personality and are not willing to sit down long enough to read a chapter in a book. As home schooling families, we need to emphasize the schoolwork and not allow the family lifestyle to be shaped by outside activities.

Of course, home organization in general is a very "hot topic" these days. A search for "home organization" on the Amazon website brings up 939 book matches. A Google search brings up over 500,000 links. Many books and websites do offer good suggestions for organization, and many offer organization systems you can try. But whatever system you use, the most important point is to commit

yourself to being organized and to stick with it. Have a plan, and implement the plan.

My husband is okay with the home schooling, but he does not want to help. What do you suggest?

Many husbands have a wait and see attitude; your husband might want to help later after he gets accustomed to the change in the house. Other husbands start out not wanting to help because they feel that since "my wife decided to do this," it is her personal project. But after a few weeks, you should ask, indirectly, your husband to help out. For instance, perhaps he could build a bookcase or take the kids on a trip to a museum. Perhaps your husband could help out with a science project, taking the kids to the drug store or hardware store to purchase the materials, and then helping to set up the project. Your husband might have a special skill or talent or interest in art or music or history; he might be able to work just one hour on a weekend to discuss that interest. Look in the local newspaper for events, such as a re-enactment of an historical battle, that he and the kids might visit, or even be participants.

I know counselors are available, but I hate to call for help. I figure it will soon work itself out.

It is certainly your decision whether or not to phone a counselor. However, we sometimes receive rather frantic calls at the end of the school year, and it is a real shame when we realize we could have helped much earlier in the year. When I asked the counselors what questions they are asked and what advice they give, the one thing they each said was, "Tell them to call

earlier in the year when they have a problem or a question." They also said that no one should feel embarrassed for calling. It is the job of the counselors to answer questions to help parents and students. We have a dozen academic counselors available five days a week to answer your questions.

Many questions are quite familiar to the counselors and can be answered quickly. You may think you have an intractable problem, but a counselor may have heard about it and given an answer many times. There is no point worrying for weeks or months about a problem that could be solved in a few minutes with a counselor.

As home schooling families, we need to emphasize the schoolwork and not allow the family lifestyle to be shaped by outside activities.

Remember, counselors are available by email as well as phone. Send email to counselors@setonhome.org.

The counselors at Seton don't mind answering questions. In fact, they are happy to help.

Why do you have beginning sentences for the first two book reports?

A few years ago, we started providing beginning sentences or beginning paragraphs for the first two book reports because we are trying to teach the students that what we are looking for is *analysis*, not simply a statement of facts. We are living in a society that says there is no such thing as truth, everything is a matter of opinion, and my opinion is as good as your opinion.

What we want the students to learn is to think logically, to realize that an

opinion should be based on facts. We want to teach the students how to find the facts, how to show that examples or details can prove the conclusion. By writing these book analyses, students are developing their ability to think logically, which we hope will help them in the future as they determine the truth of statements they hear on television or read in the newspapers. Someday, we hope good Catholic home schooled students can be future judges and legislators, lawyers and police chiefs. In these positions perhaps they can bring truth back to a society being tossed about by every crazy idea that appears on the horizon, or from the netherworld.

Sometimes teens need some quiet time in a local college library where the atmosphere can help motivate doing the academic work.

My high schooler seems to need me but I am busy with the younger children.

There is no question that you need to help the younger children, but many students in high school, especially if they have not been schooled at home, need help even in the high school years. If this is the case, you should consider asking your husband, or perhaps an older brother, aunt, uncle or a retired school teacher to help the teenager. Sometimes the older high school student does not need too much help on the daily concepts as much as help in persevering, in staying on task, in getting the work done in a timely manner. Either way, help from someone else, even on a part-time, couple-of-times-a-week basis can be of great help.

Certainly a main goal we must have with our high school students is to teach them personal responsibility, and to teach them

how to study and learn on their own. After all, you cannot go with him to college or vocational school. When you read the Bible, especially Proverbs, it is very clear that fathers should be involved, and that the key to being a good son is to obey. So first, I would figure out which course is the easiest for him, and see what he does or how he studies for the easiest course. What techniques does he use? Is he underlining or highlighting in the text? Is he outlining? Does he go on our web site and look for resources? You need to see how he best learns and have him apply those techniques to the other courses.

Also, we have a free Study Skills course on our web site, especially geared for our high school students. He can access it by going to our web site at www.setonhome.org. The second item down on the right says "Online Courses." He can click on the free Study Skills course, and it will give him tips in good study practices and techniques.

Your son might also benefit from the oral lessons we have on our web site. We have these for several English courses, such as English 9, English 10, World Literature, and American Literature; English 12 is in process. We also have lectures on World History and American History, as well as Latin and Spanish.

Some support groups have a weekly day or two where students can meet together to work on a few subjects. If something like this is available, it might be worth trying. Oftentimes, just the peer pressure of needing to finish something up for the next class will be sufficient to motivate a student.

And don't forget that sometimes these teens need some quiet time in a local college library where the atmosphere of study with books and computers can help motivate doing the academic work.

What special helps do you have for mothers who really cannot remember much about math?

Starting in the 5th grade, we have the DIVE CDs which tutor the

students for each and every lesson in the Saxon books. They are \$50 each, and are available for 5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th, as well as for Algebra ½, Algebra 1, Algebra 2, and Advanced Mathematics. The CD, via the computer, gives an audio lecture and a visual picture on the computer screen of the problems being worked out on a "blackboard." The CD can be replayed anytime the student wants to review.

How important is it to go to Mass everyday when it is so difficult to complete the home schooling assignments?

Each of us home schooling parents must decide what is best for our family, but those of us who do attend Mass every day believe that it is essential for our spiritual welfare and home schooling success. Once we have the consolation of Our Lord Jesus Christ every day, for ourselves and for our children, the rest of the day's problems, difficulties, or responsibilities seem lighter. Daily Mass seems essential to many of us for Catholic family life.

Some families find that, rather than being a burden, daily Mass lends a structure to the day that they don't have otherwise. Getting the children up and dressed and off to Mass allows the day to start in a good way. If the children don't need to get up and get dressed, then they often will just lie in bed or lounge around the house in their pajamas and not really get going until quite late in the day. Cultivating a habit of getting up and getting going can only be helpful to home schooling and to life in general.

Remember the saying that our children are our ladders to heaven. In other words, in the process of raising them and teaching them to be good and educated Catholic children, we grow ourselves in the virtuous life. We must develop patience and understanding. We grow in the kind of love that serves others rather than ourselves. We learn when to listen and when to discipline.

Worship as Warfare: Prayer and Spiritual Combat

by Father Paul Scalia

The concept of “worship as warfare” may seem a bit unusual. Is there an important and distinctively Catholic association between worship and warfare? Father Paul Scalia, in his talk, “Worship as Warfare: Prayer and Spiritual Combat,” examines the scriptural underpinnings, liturgical traditions, and necessary “tactics” that underlie and define our spiritual strategies and prayerful battles.

Father Scalia begins by asking an obvious question: “What could these two things [worship and warfare] possibly have in common?” Warfare includes “violence...sometimes slaughter, and a fair amount of horror.” He compares these aspects with some of the common characteristics of worship: “Worship, on the other hand, is meant to be beautiful,” and “bring us some measure of peace.” Despite this seeming opposition, “worship and warfare we find linked throughout Scripture and throughout the Church’s tradition.”

Examples that illustrate the connection between worship and warfare are numerous. “Take, for example, the use of the trumpet in ancient Israel.” God commands His faithful to “Make two silver trumpets...you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp.” The silver trumpets have a dual purpose, both warfare and worship.

In adhering to a peculiarly modern mode of understanding the Holy Scriptures, some tend to dismiss or recast certain events and teachings of the Old Testament. A contemporary reaction to the account of the fall of Jericho might be: “That’s the Old Testament, where God was mean and angry and nasty and we know that in the *New* Testament He would never, never get involved in such things.” Father disagrees with this kind of thinking. “Our Lord was the one who threw the money changers out of the Temple,” and thus He was “not ashamed to provoke a little warfare.”

But this union of worship and warfare is not restricted to the Old Testament.

“Consider the Magnificat of Our Lady,” Father suggests. Our Lady praises God for punishing “the proud.” Surely, God does not change; in the New Testament, He does not suddenly become the “enlightened” or “tolerant” God of contemporary fixation.

Regarding worship and warfare, the most important text is the Book of Revelation. “There are two themes throughout the book of Revelation: warfare and worship.” The descriptions in Revelation are filled with militaristic activity and symbolism, such as how the devil and his angels are cast out of Heaven. “Even in the Mass today, the Church carries this understanding that prayer is a battle.” The manner in which a priest vests for Mass is like that of a soldier preparing for battle. “The first vestment that a priest puts on goes around the neck...it is called the *amice*, for the Latin word for *helmet*. The priest prays that the Lord places on his head the *helmet of salvation* for fighting back the diabolical forces.”

The Lord’s Prayer is also an example of worship and warfare. The relevant and critical words in the Our Father are: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.” “Those words are both worship and a call to arms. God’s will being done in Heaven is primary,” and the faithful who pray “want the world to imitate that order. To say ‘thy will be done’ is as good as a declaration of war against this world and the prince of this world.”

There are three major tactics in a Catholic’s prayerful campaign. “The first tactic is repetition. Warfare, combat are repetitious. The marches, the drills, the patrols, the repeated efforts of things” are necessary training for battle. “Inevitably, warfare comes down to the effect of the troops on the ground, and the repeated efforts at conquering the foe.” This repetition and familiarity are especially important in the Mass, so that Catholics “enter into” the Mass. “Worship must have a structure. The Mass is not something that changes day-to-day. It is something that is

set so that we can enter into it.” Hence, “Without that repetition in prayer and worship, the familiarity necessary for people to pray won’t be there. No, worship should be repetitive” and not new. In support of this liturgical perspective, Father notes that “In Heaven, the worship is repetitive,” and “For eternity, the angels sing before the Lord: Holy, Holy, Holy!” The quest for novelty in the modern world is not something that comes from God.

Father identifies the second tactic in spiritual combat as “action.” “Worship, however, we don’t usually think of as action. But, of course, as Catholics we know, instinctively, that worship *must* be action. There must be the physical involvement of the body in our prayer. It is the entire person who prays...we are not pure spirits. When we hear about the divine liturgy in Heaven...we hear about thrones, incense, crowns, and so on.” Considering heavenly worship and its corresponding earthly form, “Mass sets the standard for us by involving the body in the action of prayer. The body ought to pray as well. It must be an action. So we have genuflections, signs of the cross, kneeling, standing, bowing. We have incense, bells, vestments, music, and so on. ...All of this is a way of involving the body in the battle of prayer.”

The third tactic in spiritual combat may be surprising: singing. “Some of the greatest songs in history are about war: *The Song of Roland*, *The Iliad*....” Regarding the apparent dichotomy between war and singing, Father points out that the “good guys” are “able to maintain joy and sing.” How exactly does singing help in spiritual combat? It is because singing is a holy act, a way in which the faithful “extol God’s glory and power.” “When we celebrate His power and glory, when we celebrate even His death, with song, then we are giving thanks to Him...we make incursions into their [the demons’] territory.”

The Old Testament, the New Testament, and the tradition of the Church offer an interesting and illuminating view of the relationship between worship and warfare. Through repetition, action, and singing, a Catholic arms himself in spiritual combat. In honoring and continuing the ancient practices and traditions of the Church, we strengthen ourselves to win our heavenly reward.

Gift to a Mother

Editor's note: This former Seton student was assigned in college to write a letter to a former high school teacher. Since, she was homeschooled, she wrote to her mother.

Dear Mom:

You were my *only* teacher in high school, but I could not have asked for a better teacher. You taught me more than you could ever know, more than I could ever ask for, more than anyone will ever fully begin to appreciate. By home schooling me, you changed the very core of my being from a lost and bewildered little girl into the strong woman I am proud to be. It was through your example and growth that I have become the greatest thing I could ever hope for and the only thing I have ever wanted to be – I have become me.

I remember my reaction to your telling me you were home schooling me and [my brother and sisters]. I remember the tears and the shouting. I remember that I fought you tooth and nail with every idea and immaturity that accompanies a girl of thirteen. I simply could not see how removing me from mainstream society was good for me in any way. I envisioned myself locked in my bedroom for the rest of my life, and my somehow becoming a ridiculous nerd of epic proportions. I saw only my isolation and loneliness, and I saw myself unable to ever regain any semblance of normalcy.

It makes me laugh now to think about just how ridiculous I actually was. Your brave decision to home school all of us changed my life forever. You removed us from the grips of public opinion, of peer pressure, and of high school drama. I remember initially wanting to be a part of the drama instead of just looking at it from the very distant outside, and then I remember shaking my head as I watched my friends slowly go downhill. I remember my best friend telling me she had lost her virginity at fifteen.

I remember hearing that one of my good friends in middle school had gone to high school to deal drugs and landed in prison. I can still remember one of my old teachers telling me that the Valedictorian of my middle school class got pregnant and moved to California to get married. I remember wondering what happened to them, and I remember thanking God that I was not part of it.

Without distractions of peers and appearance and the “drama” I had wanted so badly, I was able to truly become the person that I was meant to be, instead of a carbon copy of a typical high school student. You gave me the gift of individuality and a freedom from peer pressure. I was able to grow and learn in an environment without judgment or pressure. I could be whom I wanted and what I was as I changed extensively and learned more about the world around me.

Perhaps the most important aspect of your teaching was the morals and virtues and characteristics that you instilled in me and in each one of us. You taught us our religion better than ten years of parochial school had, discussed higher principles than had ever been discussed, and instilled ethics that we had never considered. You, as our mother, know us better than anyone and were able to gear your teaching to us individually according to our strengths and weaknesses, and you were able to touch something inside of each one of us because of it. You were able to go deeper into each one of our subjects with us, discuss each point, and pull out more information than just what was given on the surface.

Little by little, I began to appreciate everything that you had done for us, the sacrifice that you had made. I remember going to bed and seeing the dining room light on until wee hours of the morning as you sat up to make up lesson plans and correct papers. You were

incessantly working with me and [my brother and sisters] until you knew that we learned the materials. You proofread papers, corrected assignments, made us re-do things that were not up to your expectations. You made all of your children better students and academically hard workers.

However, more importantly, I was able to learn more about you. I had loved you my whole life as my mother, but it was not really until we began home schooling that you became my best friend. I remember coming to you almost every day with a new tidbit of information that I had learned in a particular subject, and we would talk about it, analyze it, offer each other different points of view. I learned more about your opinions on various subjects, and it was then I began to fully realize just how alike we are. I learned that I was able to talk to you about almost anything, and you were always there when I needed you. Even now as I am in college and so far from home, I know I can still call you no matter what time of day or night; you are always there to patiently listen and offer advice, never judging and never scolding, but always honest and pointed.

As a child and into my schooling years, as a strict parent, you taught me to walk, to talk, to love, to tell the truth, to be nice, to be patient. In high school, as my teacher, you taught me Algebra, Biology, Shakespeare, English, Logic. As my mother, you taught me ethics, principles, morality, religion. As my best friend, you taught me how to deal with people when they bother me, how to handle the opposite sex, how to have fun. Perhaps no one can ever truly understand how much you have taught me, but to say that you taught me how to be me through your love and your example is probably the simplest explanation. You gave me the gift of myself and the gift of the greatest friend anyone could ask for. And for those gifts I will perhaps never truly be able to find the words to thank you enough.

The Middle School Years

by Ginny Seuffert

The balancing act between upholding high standards while being flexible in our assignments can become a bit tricky during the middle school years, fourth through sixth grades. Many of our Moms have a baby to nurse, one or two toddlers running around, and primary grade students who need nearly constant tutoring. By fourth grade, most home-schooled students have mastered the basics and are fairly competent learners. Some harried Moms are hoping to assign the work and correct it later, with minimal input from teacher. Seton's expectations change too, and quarterly tests appear in vocabulary, science and history, and of course, the book reports begin. Even students who breezed through learning the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic find they will not be able to pass through middle school on their natural intelligence alone. How can teaching parents help their students continue to make strong progress during these years?

Where do I start?

As with all the other grades, the place to start is Seton's lesson plans. Many parents read the lesson plans to see the day-by-day assignments, but make sure that you don't skip the introductions. The foreword for each course's assignments presents the objectives for the year. Once you understand the goals, you can customize the daily lesson plans to meet the standards in a way best suited to your individual learner.

Where should my child be at the beginning of the middle school years?

One absolute criterion is to ensure that your children have sufficiently mastered the basics of learning skills before they tackle the advanced work of middle school. The California Achievement Test can help you to determine this, but so will your daily observations. At the very least, by the beginning of fourth grade, your children should be fluent readers who will spend the next several years expanding their vocabulary, and grasping more sophisticated concepts related to what they read. They should

have thoroughly mastered the four basic arithmetic operations, have memorized their math facts, and have a good understanding of fractions, measurement and time. They should know the basics of good spelling, grammar and punctuation and be able to write simple paragraphs. They should have a good understanding of all of the questions and answers in the Baltimore Catechism, and have already committed the prayers to memory.

What if we are not there yet?

Some children just get a slow start out of the educational gate, while others do not begin home schooling until they are pulled out of schools that were just not working for them. Whatever the reason, your children will master the basics of learning the same way young performers get to Carnegie Hall: practice, practice, practice! If math facts or catechism questions are a problem, add fifteen minutes of flash cards, computer review, or some other drill each and every day. If spelling and grammar are a problem, assign what worked for the teaching sisters for all those years: daily practice writing sentences. If your children really have a problem composing sentences, let them copy sentences from one of the work texts. History, science, art, music and gym can be fun to teach and fun to learn, but they should be put on the back burner until the student has mastered the basics.

I have lots of younger children! How can I possibly find the time to help keep my middle schooler on track?

No question, Moms with lots of children need to organize their day to make time for older students. One plan is to divide subjects into those that require minimal help, from those that need some coaching. Middle school students can usually complete their assignments in vocabulary, spelling, map skills, and religion with little or no help. Assign those subjects first thing in the morning while Mom works with the little children. In the late morning, let the primary students

take turns watching the baby and toddlers, while you spend some time with your middle schooler. After lunch, make sure that all your younger children either nap or rest in bed for at least an hour, so you have time to help with the really intense assignments that require some one-on-one time with Mom, like compositions, or sometimes math or reading. In the evening, after the younger children are tucked into bed, glance at your middle school student's work and lesson plans. If you are short on time, you do not necessarily have to correct them, but it is a good idea to make sure that assignments are being completed on schedule.

Sometimes my middle school child finds the written assignments a bit overwhelming.

Unquestionably, some children find written work quite laborious. We can lessen the burden a bit by assigning fewer written tasks, while at the same time making sure that the subject matter is reviewed. I often do not assign all the exercises at the end of the history and science chapters, especially in fifth and sixth grade. Instead we read the chapter together, and I help the student take notes, outlining the work, highlighting important sections in the text, and making sure that really important information is understood and written down. (I should confess that I glance over the quarterly exams to make sure that the student can study for them from class notes.) Besides lessening the written work burden, note taking is an important educational skill.

Often young minds do not make the connection between written schoolwork and the real world. Letter writing is a wonderful learning tool that combines grammar, spelling and composition with basic courtesy, and even some real life charity. Although your children will probably whine, like mine did when they were younger, make sure that they write gracious thank you notes for gifts they receive. Have them write elderly or distant relatives, and enclose pictures of family holidays or sports events. In my youth, only handwritten letters were considered polite, but I think even older folks would appreciate a computer-generated

letter today. It might be fun for your child to custom design a greeting card, or decorate a letter with downloaded photos; just make sure a personal message is included.

A computer is often the key to improving written work. Most students prefer keyboarding to handwriting, and it certainly is easier to edit compositions and find colorful synonyms. If you cannot afford a computer, most public libraries will allow patrons to use their computer workstations for free, and they are often available during the hours when most children are in school.

There seems to be an awful lot of facts for middle school children to learn.

One of the biggest mistakes that institutional school made over the last several decades was to decide that children really do not need to commit facts, like dates, battles, and important persons or places, to memory. Instead, they looked to give children the “tools of learning” like reference skills, so they would be able to research independently what interests them. Sadly, many of the graduates of these schools are woefully ignorant of even the most basic information they need to be culturally literate. Memorized facts form the framework into which we “fit” our researched information. For example, it is difficult to research the Battle of Gettysburg if one lacks general knowledge of the Civil War. A student

cannot write a report about the Declaration of Independence, if he or she did not know that what is now the United States was once a British colony. Having mastered the basic skills of learning during the primary years, much of the time in fourth through sixth grade is spent learning facts that must be committed to memory and form the foundation for the more sophisticated learning that will come later.

I have to admit, I have little sympathy for students who whine and cry over memorization. Most boys I know can rattle off baseball statistics like professional sportscasters. This is the age when even home-schooled children know more about the personal lives of Hollywood celebrities and popular music artists than they do about the Founding Fathers or the saints. They can memorize all right, they just want to follow their own interests!

How can parents move children's minds from popular culture to more important topics?

The answer to this question can be found in one word: exposure. If children spend too much time in front of the tube watching “celebrity magazine” shows, they will develop a taste for trashy magazines. If Dad and sons attend sports matches, watch them on TV, and discuss them over dinner, we shouldn't be surprised that all Junior thinks about is sports.

On the other hand, if you listen to fine music during car rides, and take your children to concerts, they will grow to know and understand something other than popular music. Alert parents follow up this interest, perhaps with books about the Bolshoi Ballet or the life of Mozart. My husband took several of our daughters to the church choir with him. If nothing else, they gained an understanding of sacred music, the parts of the Mass, and even some Latin.

Travel is a wonderful way to set young minds on fire. Visit restored homes, battlefields, museums, zoos, nature trails, and anything else that will capture your children's imaginations. Then follow up with books or movies about the subject. If you cannot afford travel, research what is available in your immediate area. Even rural families, with no access to zoos and museums, can take nature walks, and memorize the names of local flora and fauna.

The key in the middle school years is following two paths. The first leads to a sound Catholic education as found in Seton's curriculum. It is not necessary, or even desirable, that your students complete every exercise in every book, but they do need to master all the concepts. The second path is to give your child lots of opportunities to turn interests into intellectual passions. Pray daily for the grace to be equal to this sacred task.

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High School Course Approval: Eric Kraske, Ext. 117
High School English: Sherry Spring, Ext. 124 or
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High School Math and Science: Tom Herlihy, Ext 165 or
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