



# Seton Home



# Study School



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“Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”

February 2008

## Our Lady of Lourdes

One of the most popular apparitions of the Blessed Mother are her appearances in 1858 to St. Bernadette at Lourdes in France, which the Church celebrates on February 11<sup>th</sup>. These apparitions contain both explicit and implicit messages that are still relevant today, especially to us home schoolers.

Bernadette grew up in a very poor family who lived in an abandoned jailhouse, which had so little heat that Bernadette suffered from respiratory problems. Bernadette’s father tried to provide for his family by transporting refuse from the nearby hospital to the dump. Though Bernadette attended school, she came irregularly because of her poor health; therefore, she struggled with her studies. Nevertheless, she had a clear understanding of the religious truths she was taught because her mother was her first and primary catechist and because Bernadette was a pious girl.

On a chilly February 11<sup>th</sup>, as Bernadette stopped to take off her shoes and socks to cross a small stream, the Blessed Mother appeared to her within a small niche or grotto in a nearby hillside. Bernadette described the Blessed Mother as being “...dressed in white. She wore a white dress and an equally white veil, a blue belt, and a yellow rose on each foot.” The Blessed Mother indicated she wanted Bernadette to say the rosary, which she did.

One message the Blessed Mother implicitly sends to us through Bernadette is the need to slow down and take time out for meditation and prayer even when we have pressing daily duties. We cannot

expect to accomplish successfully our duties, especially the great work of home schooling our children, if we do not take time out for prayer.

Bernadette felt drawn to the grotto. It was on the eighth apparition that the Blessed Mother gave Bernadette a message: “Penance! Penance! Penance! Pray to God for sinners!” This is a second and explicit message from Our Lady to us.

With everything going on in our secular society, and with wars around the world, the Blessed Mother wants us to pray the rosary and do penance for sinners. This message is still important today as we celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Blessed Mother’s message at Lourdes.

It was at the ninth apparition that the Blessed Mother asked Bernadette to dig in the dirt and eat the leaves of the plants nearby. The people thought she went crazy. They asked Bernadette why she was doing that, and she said “For sinners.” As most people left the scene, however, Bernadette kept digging and eventually a spring of water appeared. Bernadette drank the water. After a later apparition, a lady put her dislocated arm and hand into the spring, and instantly was cured.

The ninth apparition carries a third message for us from the Blessed Mother: The “crowds” of our society, often even from our family, friends, and fellow parishioners, should not dissuade us from being obedient in the following God’s commands. As we know, our Baptismal promise is to teach the Faith to our children; therefore, in our homes we must both teach and practice the message of Our Lady of Lourdes.

Because of the crowds coming to see Bernadette in Lourdes, the local police threatened to put her in jail unless she would deny the apparitions. Bernadette, only fourteen years old, held firm to the truth and, in spite of the fear she must have felt as a young girl, she continued to go the grotto, to kneel in prayer, to drink the water, and to listen to the beautiful lady.

The Blessed Mother, at the thirteenth apparition, told Bernadette to go to the priest and ask him to build a chapel in that location. The parish priest was hesitant and asked Bernadette to ask the Lady her name.

Bernadette’s experiences suggest a fourth message for us: the need to accept patiently and lovingly the suffering of being misunderstood, while still continuing to do what we know is right and necessary. If we maintain our patience and love, but persevere with prayerful determination, most pastors, like Bernadette’s, will eventually come to see the fruit of home schooling and the critical need for it in a decadent society.

Our Lady of Lourdes, the Immaculate Conception, give us the strength and the powerful love we need to make the necessary sacrifices to live the Catholic home schooling lifestyle to protect our children and to train them to be apostles for your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

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## *Questions We Are Asked*

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

**I have enrolled one child in high school, but I never assigned any book reports. Now with another child in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I am wondering if I should enroll her now to get her ready for high school work.**

One of the biggest problems for students who enter our ninth grade is that they have never written a book report—or book analysis, as we call it. They have no concept about developing character or understanding theme. They have never thought about “reading between the lines” or interpreting events. These are higher level thinking skills which we expect in high school, but which we introduce in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.

If your daughter enrolls in our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, she will be taking our reading course which includes two workbooks, one in Reading Comprehension, one in Reading-Thinking Skills. She will be doing four book reports each year. This will prepare her for our Seton high school courses.

**My son is struggling with Algebra I. I am too busy to help him. Do you have any special tips?**

Our math counselor writes: Students usually struggle for two reasons. They do not *fully* understand the concepts and problem solving techniques being taught; and/or they are getting problems wrong due to careless errors.

A simple method may prove useful. In working out both the Practice problems and the Problem Set problems after each textbook lesson, have the student do the problems *one at a time* and then immediately check the Solution Manual to find out whether or not he did the problem correctly. If his answer is correct, he can move on right away to the next problem. If his answer is wrong, he can match his solution to the step-by-step

one in the Solution Manual to find out precisely where his mistake was made. Once he has isolated his mistake, he should then redo the problem completely to insure that he can do it correctly.

By use of this method the student will not be overwhelmed by a number of conceptual misunderstandings all at once. Instead, he will be able to focus on precisely the misunderstanding or careless error the solution revealed and get immediate help from the solution manual to correct it. Also, an added feature will come into play since if the student got the first problem wrong due to a careless error, and he knows this before he does problem # 2. He will tend to be more careful with that problem and subsequent problems. In any case, it is better to do one problem incorrectly and then correct it, than to do twenty problems incorrectly and then have to correct them all.

Don't forget that we have the D.I.V.E. tutoring CDs for every lesson in the Saxon textbook. This has proven to be an invaluable help for a busy mother.

Patience, perseverance, and prayer, both on the part of the parent as well as the student, will pay off.

**I can't seem to get organized. I feel my day just slips away.**

First you need to pray for help to get organized. Pray to your patron saint, or a saint who accomplished so much in so little time, such as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, who was a mother and a teacher.

You can't be too organized. You need a system and you need to work the system. It's like taking medicine; you need to get into the habit of taking it and not allowing yourself to forget or to say “Well, I don't need it right now.”

Your system needs to start with writing your “jobs” down, not on scraps of paper or on the cover of your phone book. You

need a planner, a big colorful planner that cannot disappear. You need a special place, a one and only place where your planner goes but where you can refer to it often. (Some people use an electronic planner, which can have good aspects, but is probably more time-consuming than a written planner.)

Your planner should be on your desk. Some moms do not have desks. That is a BIG mistake. A desk is a place that belongs to you and to you alone. This is the place where you keep your planner and where you take care of the bills. This is where you keep your important papers and your lesson plans. If you have several children you are home schooling, you might want a two-drawer

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*Once he has isolated his mistake, he should then redo the problem completely to insure that he can do it correctly.*

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or four-drawer filing cabinet to keep tests and answer keys.

Once you have things organized, then you need a schedule. While it is difficult to keep to a schedule when you have babies and toddlers who won't stay on a schedule, you need to be persistent in trying; otherwise, you won't be able to accomplish anything.

Schedule in the morning the subjects which are most difficult for your children, such as math and English. Schedule reading lessons when the baby is taking his nap. Many children can do the easier subjects by themselves in the afternoon, such as the spelling, vocabulary, and handwriting.

If you still have trouble being organized, find an organized home-schooling mother nearby who might come and help you to get organized. Sometimes a fresh look by a friend can be very helpful.

### **Should I keep trying to get my husband to help me?**

This depends on how difficult it is to get him to help you. You don't want to destroy your marriage in trying to get him to teach a class. There are such a variety of ways your husband can help that it is hard to believe he cannot do something. For instance, if he does not want to be involved in the teaching, ask him to help supervise the kids with some of the housework. Perhaps he would be willing to take the kids out for field trips now and then.

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## *We are in the process of obtaining direct lines for all our academic counselors.*

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Husbands are especially great when it comes to building bookcases, or putting up a closet or a wall to enclose some space in a family room or lower level, or convert a garage to a classroom. You might find that a friend will help him, which will encourage him to get it done more quickly.

Husbands can help, depending on their job, by taking a child to work once a week. Children in grades seven through twelve are old enough to benefit from seeing Dad at work. This helps them to understand the value of their studies in relation to their future careers.

Most of all, you and your children need to pray for your husband that he stays healthy and that he can continue to work and support the family. What he may not realize is that the difficulties of life are much easier if he spends some quality time with his children. He may not realize that teaching his children, formally or informally, is one of the greatest joys a parent can have.

### **I have a boy who is just not interested in doing any schoolwork. Have you any ideas for motivation?**

First, pray about it to your son's patron saint and guardian angel, to give him the motivation to do his schoolwork. Ask him to pray with you as he begins each class for the day.

Second, either you or your husband should try to find out from him directly why he does not want to do his schoolwork. It may be that the textbooks are not at his level. Be sure that the textbooks are not too easy, so he is bored and does not want to do anything; or that the textbooks are not too difficult so he is frustrated and does not want to feel unsuccessful. We can adjust books, even subject by subject.

Having raised and taught seven sons, I can tell you that boys need activity. Try to do more oral work with your son; that means he is on his feet or even jumping rope while he is responding.

Purchase a big chalkboard. We found a big piece of plywood and the boys painted it with green chalkboard paint. Nowadays you can buy dry-erase boards. Consider having your son work his math problems, diagrams, and anything else while standing and swinging his arms at the blackboard.

Give your son some assignments in which he is interested already. If he needs to write a paragraph, ask him to write about his favorite sport. If he is using the computer, give him at least one assignment a day on the computer. This is another situation which may be helped by going to work occasionally with Dad. Children need to see the outside world in practice. They need to see the importance of being on time, keeping a schedule, being self-disciplined. Dad needs to talk about how he uses his math skills or English or writing skills in doing his job.

### **We are definitely behind in our lessons, but I don't want to go past June. Have you any suggestions?**

When we write the lesson plans, we include many ideas for assignments. We believe it is better to have more than you need than not enough. While doing all the assignments is the best way for students to learn the most, many students can do well by doing most of the assignments.

Good study habits and being efficient are essential. Good study habits mean the chapter or assignment should be looked over completely, reading headings and subheadings, looking at pictures and illustrations, and reading the end-of-chapter review questions. Then the chapter or assignment should be read with no distractions. While reading, the student should be referring back to the end-of-chapter questions and highlighting or underlining the phrases answering the questions.

The student should study the questions and the underlined phrases to prepare for the test. The student should take the test as soon as he believes he is ready to do well.

Your student may do very well in some subjects, such as spelling or vocabulary. Reduce the time for these courses, taking two or three days to finish up what would normally take five days.

Consider having your student take an extra hour in the evening with one subject with Dad. For instance, assign an extra math lesson each night.

One year when we were moving and my boys wanted to catch up after the move, we had home schooling every Saturday morning until they caught up. They preferred that to shortening their summer vacation.

Discuss various ideas with your student; have him help you and agree to any plan for extra study time. Your student is more likely to follow the extra-time regimen if he is part of the decision-making process.

### **What is the quickest way to reach a counselor?**

Usually parents or students are able to reach counselors quickly by calling the main number, but it may save you time and money if you can phone a counselor directly. If you look on page 7 of this newsletter, you will see that some counselors have direct phone numbers. We are in the process of obtaining direct lines for all our academic counselors. In addition, we are implementing a new system in which your family account will appear on the counselor's computer screen immediately, based upon your phone number. This will allow our counselors to serve you more quickly.

## *Lenten Challenge*

*by Rev. Thomas Euteneuer  
President of Human Life International*

Lent begins in early February with the acceptance of ashes on our foreheads and the practice of fast and abstinence. These rules and customs of the Church, as holy as they are, do not replace the one thing that the Church can't teach us through a ritual: self-renunciation. The only thing that will make this season different from the rest of the year is the degree to which we decide to uproot our selfishness. This is the Lenten challenge.

The power-of-positive-thinking piety that emanates from most of our nation's pulpits each Lent does us a grave injustice. We must avoid the temptation to whitewash Lent by making it into a season to do "positive" deeds. That misses the point by a mile and keeps us in a state of spiritual adolescence: good deeds are an expression of our ordinary faith in Ordinary Time! The color of Lent is purple for a reason: it is a penitential season, full of mature self-examination leading to a deepening repentance from our selfishness. If we miss that aspect of Lent we are just playing the piety game, and we waste forty good days that may change the world, starting with ourselves.

Most people tend to think that self-denial is some sort of a program of self-improvement. Giving up vices like smoking and drinking may improve our day-to-day living, but then again, it may make us even more miserable to live with! This approach to Lent, however, is still so absorbed with the self. It mires us in a concern about conduct and personal habits

but does not bring us the deepest conversion that Jesus sought to effect when He said, "Reform your lives!" (Not your habits.) Habits change when hearts change, and then good works usually flow out of us naturally as a sign that the selfish blockages have been removed.

The renunciation of selfishness is not an abstract concept or ideal. Selfishness is very concrete. I am selfish in this, that, or the other way, and I won't grow spiritually unless I get it out of my system. The Church can't determine ahead of time what the specific renunciation must be for each individual. The answer to that question is rooted in each

person's own self-understanding and basic honesty. That is why a prophet like John the Baptist stands over the season like a sentinel awaiting the dawn. He knew a lot about self-denial, the intrepid practice of "laying the axe to the root of the tree" and unearthing the main cause of our worldly attachments and selfish desires. Whatever is not of God must go so that we can be much more for God in this world and prepare ourselves for the world to come.

As we begin this holy season, let us ask ourselves not what we are going to give up for Lent. We have to be more radical than that. We must ask ourselves what selfishness in us we are going to eradicate that will put us on the road to Christ's Resurrection forty days hence.

[www.hli.org](http://www.hli.org)

### *Seton 2008 High School Graduation*

Seton Home Study School will hold a high school graduation ceremony on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The ceremony will be held on the campus of Christendom College, in Front Royal, Virginia. The graduation will begin with Mass in the Christendom College Chapel of Christ the King at 2:00 p.m. As soon as practical following Mass (approximately 3:15), the graduation ceremony will be held in St. Lawrence Commons, which is adjacent to the chapel.

In order to be eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony, students must meet eligibility requirements. Generally, a student must have completed, or expect to complete, his high school work in the 2008 calendar year, with sufficient credits to graduate from Seton.

If you are unsure as to your credits or courses, please contact our high school guidance counselor, Bob Wiesner either at 540-636-9990 or [bwiesner@setonhome.org](mailto:bwiesner@setonhome.org).

For complete information about the graduation, and to register to participate in 2008 graduation ceremony, go to [www.setonhome.org/grad2008](http://www.setonhome.org/grad2008).



## *Rome on Parental Rights in Religious Education*

At this time in the history of Catholic home schooling, very few families have any problems with their parish in regard to the preparation for the reception of the sacraments. However, there are still occasional problems. One problem we sometimes hear is that the parish does not approve of certain books used by the parents, even when these books have an imprimatur, that is, a bishop's approval of the books.

Some years ago, as a response to the widespread problem of bad catechetical materials, the bishops set up a committee to evaluate these materials. A list of approved materials is now maintained by the committee. Some parishes want to require that parents use only materials from this approved list. However, books used by parents are not under the same regulations. This is similar to, for instance, regulations on doctors who must go to medical school and meet certain standards. However, parents who want to give their children an aspirin are not under the same regulations. As a parent teaching your own children, you are not bound by the regulations that schools or CCD programs may have.

Parents have the right to prepare their own children to receive the sacraments, using textbooks or catechisms or videos. In fact, they have the responsibility to teach their children by good example, primarily. They don't need to use books at all, though we would hope parents would use at least the Bible and stories of the saints. However, they can read the Bible or saints stories to their children, or they can tell their children the Bible stories, without putting the book in the children's hands at all.

Jesus came to earth as a Person. He taught by word and by example. He expects us to do the same, which is the teaching of the Church.

In the Rite of Baptism, the priest exhorts the parents as first teachers "to be the best of teachers." Vatican II tells us "parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so

decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it." (*Declaration of Christian Education*, #3)

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, Pope John Paul II is very definite in his description of the rights of parents to educate their children. "...it (the right) is original and primary. ...it is irreplaceable and inalienable and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others." (*Familiaris Consortio*, #36)

*The Charter of the Rights of the Family* (Article 5, a & b) states: "Parents have the right to educate their children in conformity with their moral and religious conviction...parents have the right to freely choose schools or other means necessary to educate their children in keeping with their conviction."

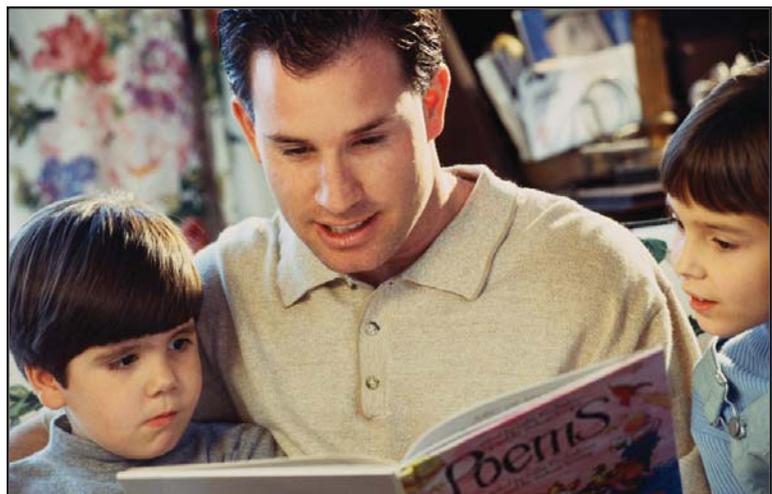
*The Code of Canon Law* supports parental rights as well. Canon 793.1 recognizes that a parent's duty to teach extends to "the right to select those means and institutions suitable for Catholic education." The means are the books or videos or catechisms or the Bible or stories of saints; the institution is the home in case of home schooling parents. As long as the catechism used contains authentic Catholic doctrine, which is approved as authentic by the imprimatur, Canon Law raises no objection. Canon 799 goes so far as to say that education of the children should be "in accord with the conscience of the parents."

Pope John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae* (#67) teaches that "...the parish must continue to be the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis." The pope added: "In short, without monopolizing or enforcing uniformity, the parish is the pre-eminent place for catechesis." Note the phrase "without monopolizing or enforcing uniformity". The parish cannot monopolize because parents are primary educators; the parish cannot enforce uniformity by insisting that parents must use the same "means" or materials that are being used in the parish.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in #2221, 2224-2226, and 2229 supports parental rights in the education of their children.

In the spirit of Vatican II and obeying the Canon Law 793.1, parents have the right, as recognized by the Church to choose the "means and institutions" to teach their own children. The pastor's responsibility is to make sure that the children are ready to receive the sacraments.

Pope John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae* writes "...in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, the 'Church of the home' remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis. Thus, there cannot be too great an effort on the part of Christian parents to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal." #68



## *Book Reports*

### *by Ginny Seuffert*

I live in Chicago, but last fall I spent some time at the Seton offices in Front Royal, Virginia. My trip was a terrific opportunity to speak to Seton counselors and find out from them exactly with which part of the Seton lesson plans parents have difficulties so I could tackle them in my column. Book reports seem to be right at the top of the list. I find that interesting because when I first enrolled my children in the program, almost twenty years ago, we were told to pick a good book and have the child write a report following some general guidelines. The present assignment—to read a given book and write the report following a provided outline—seems like a much simpler task.

Why is such a straightforward assignment causing problems? After hearing specific complaints, it seems to me that parents sometimes do not fully understand the educational purpose of book reports. Perhaps addressing the questions parents commonly ask will help.

**My child has already read the assigned book. Can't we get an alternate?**

Often the lesson plans do provide some choices for the first two quarters, and the children may pick an appropriate saint's biography for the last two quarters, so there is some flexibility. As time goes by, I suspect Seton will provide outlines for even more choices in each grade level, to allow for differences in interest among our students.

On the other hand, book reports are not intended to provide new reading experiences for students. Rather, they help the child learn how to analyze some excellent fiction in terms of important elements such as characterization, theme, and conflict. It would actually be a big benefit if the student is already familiar with the work.

**My son prefers to read non-fiction. Wouldn't he learn even more by reading about the solar system or ancient Egypt?**

Reading non-fiction teaches different skills than those learned by writing book reports. While assigned books often provide a vivid glimpse into a particular time and place in history, and half are accounts of the lives of the saints, they are not primarily intended to impart factual knowledge. Instead, students read a story chosen to present important ideas about virtue and values, and then the lesson plan leads them to consider this human experience in terms of what they know about Church teaching. At the same time, the assignments encourage children to think about various literary element — especially characterization — formulate ideas about them, and express those ideas clearly. Books about dinosaurs or wildlife in the Serengeti are certainly valuable for your son to read, but are not really appropriate for book reports.

**My daughter has trouble reading dialogue which is written in a dialect. I suspect the book is above her reading level.**

While we try to choose grade-level appropriate selections, students vary tremendously in their ability to adapt to various elements like dialects, or unfamiliar situations and settings.

Remember, increasing reading fluency is not the main purpose of book reports; the students have their readers and reading workbooks for that. By all means, read the story with your child and even read the more difficult passages *to* her, if necessary. Look up and discuss the meanings of words that are not standard contemporary American English. Many of the greatest authors of the English language wrote in dialect (Mark Twain), or used words that have fallen out of use in our own time (Shakespeare and Jane Austen). Even Laura Ingalls Wilder, who lived as recently as 19<sup>th</sup> century America, used "mosquito bar" when speaking of a window screen. Understanding dialect can be tremendously enriching for a young reader.

**Seton requires students to use set ideas, and even sentences, in the lesson plans for book reports. Doesn't this stifle my child's creativity?**

Book reports are not creative writing assignments. The outlines in the lesson plans guide students in gaining a *Catholic* understanding of important themes in the assigned books, and help them to express these ideas in a clear and organized manner.

On the other hand, if your child has an *additional related* insight into the novel, and can tie it into the assignment, by all means do so and just write an explanatory note to the Seton grader. For example, let's say your 8<sup>th</sup> grader is reading *The Yearling* by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Our lesson plan outline encourages the student to think about the main character Jody's sense of responsibility in three ways: first, how it helped him care for his pet fawn; second, how it helped him assist his family on their farm; and finally, how it aids him in resolving a conflict between his love for his pet and his family's need for survival. Perhaps your student feels strongly that Jody gained his sense of responsibility from his father, and would like to include this idea. It would be perfectly acceptable to *insert* a paragraph, perhaps with the opening sentence, "The young boy Jody learns about responsibility from the words and actions of his father." The student could then give several examples from the book that illustrate this point. Of course, this new idea would need to be introduced in the first paragraph and summed up in the concluding paragraph.

Expanding an assignment, rather than seeking to replace it, is a good way to encourage creative thinking in your students.

**Why don't the lesson plans give outlines for the two saint biographies for quarters three and four?**

We may at some point add outlines, but for now we hope students will apply the skills they learned writing book reports for the first two quarters. Because these books are based on the lives of holy people, it is not hard to come up with an outline. By all means, help your children if they are struggling. Two fairly simple plans serve as general guides. Let's

illustrate by using a biography of St. Thomas More of London.

The first plan would be to identify three virtues that St. Thomas possessed and give examples of how he practiced them to a heroic degree. For example, we might say, "St. Thomas possessed a brilliant intellect, which he humbly submitted to the teaching of the Catholic Church," and give examples from his personal life, from the books he authored, or his legal decisions while a judge. The next idea might be introduced, "Despite his numerous professional and family obligations, St. Thomas had a vigorous spiritual life marked by many pious practices," and give examples of these practices. Finally, we might say, "St. Thomas had great courage which caused him to lose his standing in society, his money, his family, his freedom and even his life, rather than deny the Catholic Faith." St. Thomas' three virtues: his humility in submitting his intellect to Church teaching, his piety, and his courage are the three main ideas of the report.

The second plan would be to focus on only one of St. Thomas' virtues and apply it to different circumstances. For example, "St. Thomas' courage allowed him to decide important cases with strict fairness, no matter the consequences, while he was a judge." Another paragraph might open with, "St. Thomas had the courage to defend Church teaching even though that meant he would lose his

place at King Henry's Court and the source of his family's income." A third paragraph might begin, "St. Thomas' courage endured even to the final moments of his life," and give examples of his words and actions on the day of his execution.

Just follow the formula of introducing your main ideas in the first paragraph, focusing in on one idea in each of the detail paragraph by giving examples from the text that support it, and by summing it all up in the final paragraph.

Book reports are often time-consuming for both students and parents, and I believe they can be a source of frustration for harried moms. Nevertheless, learning how to analyze literature in the elementary years is terrific preparation for high school and college. As always, Seton counselors are only a phone call or email away.

**Tip of the month:** When young people enjoy reading a particular piece of fiction, parents often will try to find other works by the same author, and this is a great practice. Exercise caution, however, when looking for a biography of the author, or even books about the same time and place. As a general rule, you may depend on books written before 1970 to be wholesome, but even books directed towards children written after that date may not be appropriate. Take the time to skim through a book yourself before giving it to your children.

The Seton High School English Message Board recently sponsored a Christmas Poetry contest. Here is the winning entry.

### *Grace* by Lauren Enk

It rained that night,  
When He was born,  
But not the rain we know.  
For earthly snow, celestially formed  
That night did wind-borne flow.

The rain that fell  
Was not of earth  
Or even sky above.  
The rain that fell, spilled, showered down,  
Was Grace from God's great Love.

Invisible to human eyes,  
Immutable in form,  
That rain came down, a blessing to  
Our fallen face forlorn.  
When first His infant voice,  
Did swell a human cry,  
Then, from heaven out of love,  
Grace fell from the sky.

Immaculate, His Mother,  
Kissed His Holy Face.  
The Spirit had o'ershadowed her  
For she was full of Grace.  
And Joseph, righteous, upright man,  
Knelt beside in his humility,  
For Grace to him was given,  
To care for God's own Family.

It rained that night,  
When He was born.  
But not the rain we know.  
Divine rain that night showered down  
Benediction to man below.

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Executive Editor:  
Dr. Mary Kay Clark  
Editor: Kevin Clark

## Seton Phone Numbers (Seton main line: 540-636-9990)

Admissions, Enrollment, Re-Enrollment: 540-636-2039  
Elementary: Elizabeth Alcott, Ext. 120  
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Independent Studies: Bob Wiesner, 540-636-2238  
Religion/Sacraments: Fr. Constantine, Ext. 161  
Senior Guidance & Enrollment: Bob Wiesner, 540-636-2238  
Special Needs: Stephen Costanzo, Ext. 176 or  
Sharon Hines, Ext. 151  
Testing (CAT): Clare Schmitt, Ext. 164

## Seton Email Addresses

[www.setonhome.org](http://www.setonhome.org)  
[counselors@setonhome.org](mailto:counselors@setonhome.org)  
[admissions@setonhome.org](mailto:admissions@setonhome.org)  
[grading@setonhome.org](mailto:grading@setonhome.org)  
[info@setonhome.org](mailto:info@setonhome.org)  
[enrolled@setonhome.org](mailto:enrolled@setonhome.org)  
[myseton@setonhome.org](mailto:myseton@setonhome.org)  
[shipping@setonhome.org](mailto:shipping@setonhome.org)  
[testing@setonhome.org](mailto:testing@setonhome.org)  
[SSDept@setonhome.org](mailto:SSDept@setonhome.org)

## *Benedict XVI On Christian Hope*

1. “*SPE SALVI facti sumus*”—in hope we were saved, says Saint Paul to the Romans, and likewise to us (Rom 8:24). According to the Christian faith, “redemption”—salvation—is not simply a given. Redemption is offered to us in the sense that we have been given hope, trustworthy hope, by virtue of which we can face our present: the present, even if it is arduous, can be lived and accepted if it leads towards a goal, if we can be sure of this goal, and if this goal is great enough to justify the effort of the journey. Now the question immediately arises: what sort of hope could ever justify the statement that, on the basis of that hope and simply because it exists, we are redeemed? And what sort of certainty is involved here?

### **Faith is Hope**

2. Before turning our attention to these timely questions, we must listen a little more closely to the Bible's testimony on hope. “Hope”, in fact, is a key word in Biblical faith—so much so that in several passages the words “faith” and “hope” seem interchangeable. Thus the Letter to the Hebrews closely links the “fullness of faith” (10:22) to “the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23). Likewise, when the First Letter of Peter exhorts Christians to be always ready to give an answer concerning the logos—the meaning and the reason—of their hope (cf. 3:15), “hope” is equivalent to “faith”. We see how decisively the self-understanding of the early Christians was shaped by their having received the gift of a trustworthy hope, when we compare the

Christian life with life prior to faith, or with the situation of the followers of other religions. Paul reminds the Ephesians that before their encounter with Christ they were “without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Of course he knew they had had gods, he knew they had had a religion, but their gods had proved questionable, and no hope emerged from their contradictory myths. Notwithstanding their gods, they were “without God” and consequently found themselves in a dark world, facing a dark future. In nihil ab nihilo quam cito recidimus (How quickly we fall back from nothing to nothing)[1]: so says an epitaph of that period. In this phrase we see in no uncertain terms the point Paul was making. In the same vein he says to the Thessalonians: you must not “grieve as others do who have no hope” (1 Th 4:13). Here too we see as a distinguishing mark of Christians the fact that they have a future: it is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well. So now we can say: Christianity was not only “good news”—the communication of a hitherto unknown content. In our language we would say: the Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative”. That means: the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life.

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