



Seton Home



Study School



Volume XXV, Number 3

◆ *“Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”* ◆

March 2008

St. Joseph

On March 19th, we celebrate the feast of the great St. Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus.

St. Joseph is much-loved among home schooling families, as he is a favorite patron of Catholic fathers, and of Catholic mothers who ask for his help in regard to their husbands and fathers. He is known as a special patron of families, especially of families who are looking for work for father. He is the special patron of families who are seeking a place to live, a reminder of Joseph’s role in finding a home for the Holy Family, both in Bethlehem and in Egypt.

Perhaps the most impressive lesson we learn about St. Joseph from the Scriptures is his quiet obedience. He remained silent about Mary before they were married, but when an angel appeared to him in a dream and told him that Mary had conceived by the Holy Spirit, St. Joseph never uttered a word. He never asked for an explanation. He never doubted what the angel said, nor the heavenly decision that he was to be the foster father of the Son of God. Certainly the humblest of all the saints, St. Joseph never even indicated he was not worthy. Simply without question, he accepted the decision of God for him to have the pre-eminent fatherhood position of all human men in the history of mankind.

Sacred Scripture does not record one word ever spoken by St. Joseph. He never spoke a word of doubt, never questioned a decision of God for even one second. Rather, St. Joseph willingly and immediately fulfilled the heavenly commandments given to him. The best example was the appearance of an angel

in the middle of the night to warn him about Herod. The angel told him to rise from his bed, to awaken Mary and the Christ Child, to pack up what they could, and to flee to Egypt for safety.

St. Joseph never complained when Jesus was twelve years old and disappeared for three days. Joseph and Mary searched for him throughout Jerusalem. Joseph never spoke a word except to inquire if anyone had seen Jesus. St. Joseph was not surprised to find Jesus in the house of His heavenly Father, nor was he surprised to find Jesus about the business of His heavenly Father. It was his mother who asked, “Don’t you know we have been searching for You for three days?”

Joseph, the quiet and totally trusting man of God, most likely led a deeply contemplative life of silent prayer along with being devoted to the vocal prayer of the synagogue. We can be sure that he was in constant communion with God through prayer. He likely even had a certain sense of God as the Holy Trinity, a sense which would have been confirmed by Jesus’ words in the Temple about his Father when he was twelve years old. He knew of the divinity of Jesus and of the person of the Holy Spirit since he had learned from the angel that Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit, and he knew these things were willed by the Lord God of Israel.

St. Joseph is certainly the model for all fathers, especially home schooling fathers, who realize the daily physical and emotional sacrifice their wives are making to educate and raise their children in the Faith. As the perfect master of the household of God, St. Joseph understands the demands of

being a Catholic home schooling father, and surely wants to help. He waits in patience and silence for home schooling mothers and fathers to call on him for the fatherly help that surely no other saint can give and understand as he can.

When St. Joseph returned from Egypt, he was directed by Heaven to return to Nazareth rather than Bethlehem which had been the site of the massacre of the Holy Innocents. He returned to Nazareth, a quiet and somewhat hidden town where his Son could be raised without danger.

St. Joseph, along with the Blessed Virgin Mother Mary, intercede for us home schooling mothers and fathers with your prayers to God the Father, God your Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Help us, St. Joseph, to learn how to be quietly obedient to the commands of God, without questioning or asking for explanations. Help us to teach our children to be subject to their mother and father as Jesus was to you and Mary. Also teach us parents to be completely subject to God’s will so that our authority over our children will always be just and prudent.

St. Joseph, teach fathers that prayer, work, obedience to God’s commandments, and attending to the duties of fatherhood are the best means to be pleasing to God.

-MKC

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Questions We Are Asked

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

I am homeschooling students in 8th, 5th, and 2nd. Can I manage home schooling three grade school children when I have a toddler and a new baby?

There is no question that home schooling three children with two younger ones is not an easy job. But many of us do it or have done it. The basis for success is daily prayer, especially the Rosary, and daily Mass if at all possible.

Home schooling is in the forefront of the spiritual battle being waged against the family. Those who would destroy souls are all working overtime against young families. They know the importance of winning young souls before they are strongly formed in the Catholic Faith by their parents. With the understanding that we are in a spiritual battle, we home schooling parents and grandparents need to spiritually fortify ourselves daily.

We also need self-discipline and organization in our daily chores and duties. We need to set a schedule and stick with the schedule as closely as possible. Your oldest child should be able to do some subjects on her own, such as spelling and vocabulary. She could help in other ways, such as listening to a younger one read, or helping to baby-sit with the two youngest.

Your husband could help by teaching or supervising math, science, or religion for your eighth grader. Perhaps a relative, such as your mother or an aunt, might like to help in some way. Remember that while home schooling is partly about education, it is primarily for the purpose of handing on family values. Your husband and other relatives may be able to help with this aspect as well.

My husband does not support my home schooling. He thinks my 8th grade boy should be put in school. As a result, my son is rebellious when I am teaching him.

Be sure that you pray every evening with your husband, that you pray together as a family, and that you pray during the day with your son. After prayer time is a good time to discuss a difficult issue.

First, tell your husband that perhaps the home schooling is not going as well because your son recognizes that his dad is not supportive. Ask your husband to encourage your son in his studies, commend him for his good work, and make his non-supportive remarks to you and not to your son.

Secondly, talk to your son about the Fourth Commandment, that it is God's law that children should honor both the father and the mother. For a boy of thirteen not to respect and honor his mother can be a serious sin, especially if it results in purposeful disobedience. If this happens, you need to take your son to confession on Saturdays, and review with him the times of disobedience or disrespect that he needs to confess.

Thirdly, be sure that your husband is not disrespectful to you in front of your son. This is a huge problem for home schooling mothers, and is usually the result of the husband having issues of his own. You may need to speak with him, at an appropriate time, about what is causing him to take out his frustrations toward you.

Should I consider paying a college student to come in and help me by tutoring in math?

We recommend the audio DIVE CDs for helping with the math lessons

for the Saxon books. These are great because they tutor for each and every lesson in the book, and can easily be replayed for review.

However, if your student still needs help, a college student, a retired teacher in the parish, or an uncle or grandpa may be just the answer. Once or twice a week, for an hour, should be sufficient, especially if you have the CDs also. Be sure that whoever helps your son is someone of good character who will be consistent by showing up on time each week; inconsistency by the tutor will cause your student to think that his math is unimportant. As the tutor works with your son, be sure the tutor is patient and is able to explain math so your son understands it.

Be sure that you pray every evening with your husband, that you pray together as a family, and that you pray during the day with your son.

Your student can phone our math counselors for help, but, of course, the counselors cannot spend an hour once or twice a week tutoring if that is what your student needs.

I am home schooling because I want to protect my children from the secular values as long as I can. Should I allow my high school student to take a course at the local community college?

First, you need to pray about this. Second, you need to visit the community college, walk around the halls for a while, and even sit in on a class or two. Keep in mind that only one class is a small investment of time; you definitely don't want your high school student to spend all day there. While many colleges are in the forefront of promoting anti-

Christian values (see *The Professors* by David Horowitz), the community colleges are generally not as bad. However, you and your student need to be alert.

Third, if you want the college courses to count toward high school graduation, you should check with Seton first to make sure that the credits are acceptable. In general, Seton will accept dual-enrollment credits toward a high school diploma in areas such as foreign languages, sciences (except for biology), math, music, art, and physical education. We will usually not accept dual-enrollment credits in the areas of English, Social Studies, and Religion. You can check this out by going to the Seton web site; click on Curriculum, then click on High School Catalog. You can phone our Senior Counselor, Bob Wiesner, if you have any further questions.

Some situations are so bad that you simply need to pull your child out of the situation immediately.

My son loves talking about politics, and wants to take time off of his studies to work on a political campaign. What do you think?

You certainly need to pray about this one, and discuss it at length. Students do this sometimes for politics or for sports or music, and put their studies on hold, or in slow motion. However, your student needs to make a firm commitment to obtain a high school education and diploma. Sadly, many students who take off a year do not want to return to high school, mainly because they are offered a job related to their non-academic activity. This means they end up with a GED which, in the long run, is not optimal.

Consider having your student work on the campaign over the summer, or

on weekends. This is certainly excellent experience, and when he attends college, he can continue for summers and weekends. As long as he can complete high school, the political campaign will be a good learning experience and an excellent addition to a resume.

The school my daughter is attending is assigning books with demons and perverse family relationships for book reports. One book is even noted by Father Pacwa as being dangerous for the Faith. Is it too late to enroll my daughter?

Some situations are so bad, are so detrimental to the child's welfare, that you cannot think about the pros and cons, you simply need to pull your child out of the situation immediately.

Other situations are bad, but, especially if it is a high school student, you may consider leaving her in until the end of the semester so she can get earn credit for her work up until this point.

Seton accepts students at all times of the year. We will give students in high school as much credit as we can. She may need to repeat some courses, though some, such as in the areas of math and science, likely can be repeated quickly since both courses would cover the same material. History and religion may be slower, and English may be the slowest to repeat but could be done over the summer.

Our culture has become a cesspool, especially in the schools, where children are not only being indoctrinated in secular values, but are also learning to be intolerant of Christian values, as evidenced by the tolerance of Muslim celebrations in the public schools but not Christian celebrations. Our responsibility to our children, as we all promise as parents at our children's Baptism, is to raise our children in the Catholic Faith and to protect them from any "poison" in the culture which would destroy their Faith or cause them to fall into immorality.

My son seems to be taking too much time with his Algebra I. How much time each day is reasonable?

Recall your own days in high school math classes and the homework you had to complete once you came home from school. The classes usually lasted about 50 minutes and the homework took about that long also. One lesson was studied per day and the next day the class moved on to the next lesson.

Math textbooks are written with this schoolwork/homework template in mind. Saxon textbooks are no different. With all this in mind and adapting to the home, experience has shown that it is advisable that two math periods per day be scheduled, one in the morning and one in the afternoon or evening, focusing on only one lesson per day.

Each period should be about 50 minutes since experience has demonstrated that to go beyond 50-60 minutes in one session is counterproductive.

In the first period, have your student read and understand each lesson and then begin work on the Practice problems and Problem Set problems that follow the lesson until the 50 minutes are up. Then, for the afternoon or evening session, have him pick up where he left off in order to complete the lesson.

As you ease into this two period system, evaluate just how much work the student is able to accomplish in the two sessions. If you find that he simply is not able to complete all the Practice problems and the 30 Problem Set problems in the time allotted, consider reducing the number of Problem Set problems from 30 to 20 to keep to a realistic scheduling goal of one lesson per day. If you decide to reduce the number of problems, be sure to stagger the problems worked and skipped with each lesson to insure the student is exposed to all types of stylized problems. Be aware that the more problems the student works, the better he will learn his math.

Your son should start with a prayer to his guardian angel and to his patron saint to help him learn his math. St. Matthew, the Apostle and tax collector, is a special patron of math students.

Motivation

We are frequently asked “How do I motivate my child? He is simply not interested in his studies or doing his schoolwork!”

Most Catholic parents home school because we are motivated by spiritual values. We are unhappy with the secular cultural values that pervade our schools in one way or another. We want to become a better Catholic family, we want to practice our Catholic Faith as a family, and we want our children not only to be good Catholic children, but to keep the Faith throughout their lives.

For our children to be motivated, we need to talk with them about the spiritual reasons why we are home schooling and why they need to do their schoolwork. However, for them to listen, we need to prepare them spiritually to accept the message. That preparation should begin from the day the child is born.

Whether or not you started from day one, today is the time to start. Our Lord Jesus gave a parable about the ground being prepared for the seed to grow. He meant, of course, that souls need to be prepared for the Word of God. Seed won't grow on rocky ground or on ground that is stomped on. We need to raise our children so that their souls are receptive to the message, which is learning and living the Word of God through home schooling.

To prepare our children, they need to learn their prayers early by hearing the prayers when they are newborn babies and every day following. When they are only one year old, they can repeat some of the words. By two years old, they recognize the Rosary prayers and can repeat some of the words. They know some of the words for their morning and evening prayers. They have heard some of the stories about Jesus, and some stories about the saints.

As the children grow up, begin to talk more about the Faith, about how you as a family live the Faith as well as about the sacrifices that the saints made in order to live their Faith. Mass and the prayers, the stories and the good

example you give your children, graces from the sacraments, as well as teaching them how to treat each other—all these things develop children who will be receptive to the daily sacrifices they need to make in order to become educated in the Faith and in the other academic subjects which, at Seton, are integrated with the teachings of the Faith.

At the high school level, for motivation, students can be reminded about their future, their high school transcripts, and passing the college entrance tests, as well as the possibility of winning college scholarships. Students can have a daily half-hour class in studying for the SAT or ACT test. These include tests from previous years in the areas of vocabulary, math, and reading comprehension. The book *How to Prepare for the SAT Tests* not only strengthens the math and reading skills of the student, but also makes the student more aware of what is expected to enter college, and, as a side effect, motivates the student to work better at his studies.

Younger students may be more motivated to do their lessons if they can have supplemental materials to present more interesting details, to give curious trivia, or to inform about related events. These days, many interesting books, CDs, large size picture books, reference materials, educational computer software, interactive programs online, pictures and articles online, and so on, are available to help students be more motivated to learn their lessons.

Fathers can motivate children to learn if they take an interest in their studies and encourage the children to discuss what they are learning. A father's interest and support is one of the strongest motivators for children. The Bible in the Book of Proverbs encourages fathers to motivate their children, and Pope John II spoke strongly about fathers sharing the responsibility for the upbringing of their children.

In addition, fathers should consider taking their older children to work with them whenever possible. Seeing father at work, using reading, writing, accounting,

or other skills, motivates students to develop their own skills. Fathers might even encourage their high school children to help out at work.

Mothers and fathers should consider having their children work with them on hobbies or projects which show the need for skills or information which can be learned from their home schooling studies. Enthusiasm by the parents about what is being studied can be conveyed to the children which will motivate them to learn and perhaps even to investigate more on their own.

A younger child can be motivated when an older child listens to him read, or reads something supplemental, or reviews math problems. Sometimes an older child is unexpectedly motivated as he teaches a younger child and answers questions about the subject matter.

Grandparents motivate children. Children of all ages love their grandparents to be interested in their school lessons. There is a special bond between children and their grandparents. When Grandpa or Grandma wants to listen to the grandchild reading, a child is highly motivated. Sometimes grandparents talk about their childhood or some event in their lives of long ago, which motivates children to learn more about the event.

Another motivational technique is for the family to work on a project together, such as writing and acting out a play, doing a science project, or investigating an historical event. Working on a project with another home schooling family can be highly motivational.

Keep a positive outlook and stay focused on what is being accomplished. Praise your children continually for the good and positive things they are doing. Concentrate your remarks on their successes and their strengths.

The ability for your children to be successful in their studies is dependent on the love and encouragement you can give, as well as on consistency and determination to succeed, as well as on daily prayer. With God's help, all these factors can help a child to be motivated to learn about God's wonderful world and how to gain eternal life in the next world.

The Importance of Conferences

by Ginny Seuffert

By the time you read this column, I will be packing up every other weekend or so and traveling to Catholic home schooling conferences all over the United States. Faithful readers may realize that I am breaking my own rule of strictly limiting activities that bring home schooling moms outside the home and take us away from our home schooling. Why are Catholic home schooling conferences so important that I am willing to break rule #1, and why should parents who are deciding whether or not to take the plunge, as well as old-time home educators, attend one?

Clearly those who are just considering the possibility of teaching their children at home would benefit from learning first-hand how it works and what options are available. A frequently-heard newbie objection to home education, often offered by dad and extended family, is that by denying students socialization experiences in brick and mortar schools, they will somehow turn out socially warped. At conferences the Doubting Thomases get a chance to meet actual home schooled children and be really impressed by them. I have been teaching my own children for 18 years, but I never fail to be awed when I meet other home schooled students. They are routinely clear thinking, and mature in virtue beyond their years. Even better, they seem blessedly detached from the everyday preoccupations—popularity, partying, “hooking up”, fashions, sports, and the like, that seem to dominate children in institutional schools at earlier and earlier ages. Our children are the home schooling movement’s best advertisement.

Some novice parents are rightly concerned about their children’s academic future. No one wants to cheat a young person out of an education or the chance to attend college. At home schooling conferences, they will have an

opportunity to meet experienced home school parents and hear their success stories. I am often able to reassure worried parents myself by sharing my own experience. I have had children graduate from institutional schools and four daughters have graduated from Seton. The process of getting all of them into college was identical, and all received scholarships based on merit.

All the conferences feature a vendor hall with representatives from the Catholic home school curriculum providers, Catholic book stores, and other providers of curriculum and religious materials. This is an ideal opportunity to review the books and lesson plans first-hand, and not just settle for a description in a catalog or on the Internet. Many hard-to-find books, especially religious books not commonly found in community bookstores and local libraries, are available for parents to examine and purchase. Parents can meet owners and staff members of schools and other organizations. What a great opportunity to ask company representatives specific questions about your family’s unique situation!

Not all the merchandise is educational. Conferences are wonderful locations to buy gifts for first sacraments, birthdays or early Christmas gifts. You have a chance to stock-up on rosaries, holy water fonts, religious art, and other sacramentals. Many times a priest is even on location and available to bless the items. Save money by taking advantage of conference discounts and eliminating shipping costs!

What about seasoned home schoolers, like me? Why do we organize and attend conferences when we made our home schooling decision long ago, and are comfortable with our curriculum?

For many, the highlight of Catholic home schooling conferences is the chance to hear inspiring talks on a

variety of topics. Most conferences are scheduled from March to July. Since the majority of conferences occur near the end of the school year, parents mention getting that extra bit of encouragement, that shot-in-the-arm needed to complete the current school year, or to build up enthusiasm for the next year. Aside from being frequent lecturers at conferences, priests often offer Holy Mass, hear Confessions, and are available for spiritual direction.

Others say they return year-after-year to visit with old friends, or to meet new ones; conferences are wonderful places to network with like-minded parents. Many conference organizers print name tags with the home town listed under the attendee’s name, giving parents an opportunity to locate others in their area, and to learn about local support group activities. Some add the number of years they have been home schooling or print “new” to help find each other. Some conferences have book swaps or used book sales which allow cash-strapped parents to stock up.

Many parents car pool with support group or family members, allowing them to save a few bucks and to enjoy the company. If the nearest conference is several hours away, your support group might consider renting a bus and bringing a group. Many conferences have special room rates at local hotels blocked in advance for their event. Perhaps a conference is close to where your parents or in-laws live. If so, consider bringing them along too. The Catholic materials they will see at a conference will open their eyes to a whole new world. This is wonderful time spent together, as well as a gentle way to introduce your extended family to home schooling!

Families who do not live close to a conference site sometimes make a family vacation out of it, especially in June at annual national Immaculate Heart of Mary Conference near Washington, D.C. While Mom goes to the conference, Dad takes the children to see the local attractions, or vice versa.

Is there a conference coming up near you? Keep an eye on the Seton website (www.setonhome.org). On the left side of the home page you will see a link, *Catholic home schooling conferences: Upcoming dates and locations*. Click on that and you will not only find out dates and locations, but also be referred to the conference organizers' websites for more detailed information. Closer to the conference dates, upcoming conference information is listed in the Seton monthly newsletter, which is available to everyone on-line.

Finally, if there is just no way you will be able to attend, you may still enjoy some of the benefits of a Catholic home education conference. Many sell tapes or CD's of the major speakers. This is a great way for you to get some insight into spiritual or educational issues at home while you jog or do your dishes. Check out the conference website for details. (For tapes from last year's national Immaculate Heart of Mary Conference, go to www.ihmconference.org.)

If you are able to attend a conference where I am speaking or manning a Seton table, please come up and introduce yourself. I love meeting our Seton families.

Tip of the Month

If your family follows the conventional September to June school year, and you enrolled in August or September, all of your students should be finished with Quarter 2 and well into the 3rd Quarter by the time you receive this newsletter. If you have fallen seriously behind, *now* is the time to call a Seton counselor. A counselor can help you decide where you can safely take short cuts and how you can motivate your children. There is never an extra charge for a counselor call. If you live overseas, cannot afford a toll call, or do not remember until midnight, feel free to email our counseling department for help.

Now is the time to register for the Seton 2008 High School Graduation!

Seton Home Study School will hold a high school graduation ceremony on May 24th, 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.



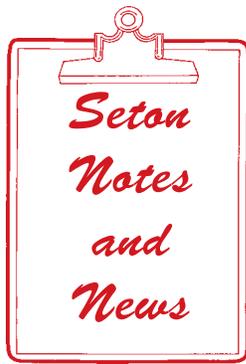
In order to be eligible to participate in the graduation ceremony, students must meet eligibility requirements. Generally, a student must have completed, or expect to complete, his high school work in the 2008 calendar year, with sufficient credits to graduate from Seton.

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.

For complete information about the graduation, and to register to participate in 2008 graduation ceremony, go to www.setonhome.org/grad2008

You need to register by March 15th. Don't delay. Register today, and you can be in next year's graduation picture!





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.

St. Louis, MO. March 14/15, 2008 (Fri./Sat.). 2008 St. Louis Catholic Homeschool Conference, Cardinal Rigali Center, 20 Archbishop May Dr., St. Louis. Fri.: 6 pm - 9 pm, Curriculum Fair, St. Louis Church, 203 South White Station Rd., Memphis. Fri.: 2 PM - 9:30 pm (Curriculum Fair: 2 pm - 5 pm, Opening Prayer and Remarks: 5:30 pm, Workshops: 6 pm, Keynote Address: 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm) Sat.: 8:45am - 3:30 pm. Information: Kim, 901-758-5032 or www.blessedsacramenthomeschool.org

Covington, LA. March 29, 2008 (Sat.). Roman Catholic Home School Association in Louisiana, St. Peter's Church (St. Mary's Hall), 125 E 19th Ave., Covington. Sat.: 9 am - 5 pm. Speakers will include Ginny Seuffert. Information: Michelle, 985-796-5794 or theriotdavid@bellsouth.net; or Beth, 985-796-1274 or rchalinfo@rchal.org.

Houston, TX. April 4/5, 2008 (Fri./Sat.). 18th Annual ARCH Book Fair and Speakers Conference, University of St. Thomas (Jerabek Athletic Center), West Main Street, Houston. Fri.: 6 pm - 9 pm, Sat.: Mass 8 am, 9 am - 4:30 pm. Information: 281-797-5578, info@arch-homeschool.org, or www.arch-homeschool.org.

Ankeny, IA. April 5, 2008 (Sat.) 8th Annual Catholic Family Homeschool Conference sponsored by Columbus Academy, Our Lady's Immaculate Heart Catholic Church, 510 E 1st St., Ankeny, IA. 8 am Mass - 3 pm. Information: Jeannie, 515-250-8894, or website www.homeschool-life.com/ia/columbusacademy

Harrisburg, PA. April 5, 2008 (Sat.). 14th Annual Catholic Homeschool Conference & Curriculum Fair, Holy Name of Jesus Parish, 6190 Allentown Boulevard, Harrisburg, PA. Speakers include

Dr. Mary Kay Clark. 8:30 am - 5 pm. Information: Ellen, 717-866-5425, conference@catholichomeschoolpa.org.

Berlin, NJ (Philadelphia area). April 12, 2008 (Sat.). 9th Annual New Jersey Catholic Homeschool Conference, Mater Ecclesiae Roman Catholic Church, 261 Cross Keys Road, Berlin, NJ. Speakers include Mrs. Ginny Seuffert. 8 am Mass - 5 pm. Info: chaplet@chaplet.org or www.chaplet.org.

Lafayette, LA. May 3, 2008 (Sat.). Immaculate Heart of Mary Lafayette Home School and Parent Conference 2008, Cajundome & Convention Center, 444 Cajundome Blvd., Lafayette, LA. Speakers include Ginny Seuffert. 9 am - 4:30 pm. Information: 540-636-1946 or lafayette@ihmconference.org.

Chantilly, VA (DC area). June 13/14, 2008 (Fri./Sat.). 7th Annual Immaculate Heart of Mary National Home School and Parent Conference 2008, Dulles Expo & Conference Center (North Hall), 4368 Chantilly Shopping Ctr., Chantilly, VA. Fri.: 9 AM - 9 PM, Sat.: 9 AM - 4:30 PM. For information: 540-636-1946 or www.ihmconference.org.

The Seton Home Study Newsletter

is published monthly by
Seton Home Study School
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Front Royal, VA 22630
Phone: (540) 636-9990
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Internet: www.setonhome.org
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Subscription price for non-enrolled families is \$15 per year. Free online at www.setonhome.org/archive/default.stm

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Lenten Message of Pope Benedict XVI

Prayer nourishes hope because nothing expresses the reality of God in our life better than praying with faith. Even in the loneliness of the most severe trial, nothing and no one can prevent me from addressing the Father "in the secret" of my heart, where he alone "sees", as Jesus says in the Gospel (cf. Mt 6: 4, 6, 18). Two moments of Jesus' earthly existence come to mind. One is at the beginning and the other almost at the end of his public ministry: the 40 days in the desert, on which the Season of Lent is based, and the agony in Gethsemane - are both essentially moments of prayer. Prayer alone with the Father face to face in the desert; prayer filled with "mortal anguish" in the Garden of Olives. Yet in both these circumstances it is by praying that Christ unmask the wiles of the tempter and defeats him. Thus, prayer proves to be the first and principal "weapon" with which to win the victory "in our struggle against the spirit of evil" (cf. Collect).

Christ's prayer reaches its culmination on the Cross. It is expressed in those last words which the Evangelists have recorded. Where he seems to utter a cry of despair: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27: 46; Mk 15: 34; cf. Ps 22[21]: 1), Christ was actually making his own the invocation of someone beset by enemies with no escape, who has no one other than God to turn to and, over

and above any human possibilities, experiences his grace and salvation. With these words of the Psalm, first of a man who is suffering, then of the People of God in their suffering, caused by God's apparent absence, Jesus made his own this cry of humanity that suffers from God's apparent absence, and carried this cry to the Father's heart. So, by praying in this ultimate solitude together with the whole of humanity, he opens the Heart of God to us. There is no contradiction between these words in Psalm 22[21] and the words full of filial trust: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23: 46; cf. Ps 31[30]: 5). These words, also taken from Psalm 31[30], are the dramatic imploration of a person who, abandoned by all, is sure he can entrust himself to God. The prayer of supplication full of hope is consequently the leitmotif of Lent and enables us to experience God as the only anchor of salvation. Indeed when it is collective, the prayer of the People of God is a voice of one heart and soul, it is a "heart to heart" dialogue, like Queen Esther's moving plea when her people were about to be exterminated: "O my Lord, you only are our King; help me, who am alone and have no helper but you" (Est 14: 3)... for a great danger overshadows me (cf. v. 7). In the face of a "great danger" greater hope is needed: only the hope that can count on God.

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