

Seton MAGAZINE



Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church

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'BACK TO SCHOOL' ISSUE

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Cover photo:
Mayrose Family

Daily at Seton, we gather before the altar at our noon Angelus and offer prayers for our families and friends. We encourage you also to pray for other homeschooling families, especially those suffering from illness, unemployment, or other crosses. United in the Communion of Saints, God allows us to uphold, support, and console other members of His Church through our prayers. Let us pray for one another as we walk the path of homeschooling, so that we may someday all join together in prayer in Heaven.



Letter from the Editor

The longest day of the year has passed, and though autumn is technically rather far away yet, our minds have turned to the routines that govern the academic year, and the occupations and activities that will begin with the fall and stay with us through next spring.

Hopefully, you're feeling energized and ready, but if you're not, the August issue of *Seton Magazine* might help.

Dr. Clark reminds us to be gentle with ourselves when we take on the large task of homeschooling, and Father McGraw delivers a powerful message about God's preferential love. In the main article, Seton staff provide suggestions for motivation, while John Clark's article reminds us that happiness is the point of all that we do as Catholic homeschooling parents.

There's food for thought in these pages. We hope you'll derive strength for your spirit and renewed faith for the coming schoolyear.

Welcome back to school!

Christine Smitha

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A Mom's Job Description

Countless Graces for Mothers

There are so many demands on us homeschooling mothers. How could we even begin to write a job description for mother, wife, teacher, and homemaker?

Nonetheless, you might consider putting together a job description. Show it to your children; they will be amazed as they consider your long list of duties. Of course, it might give you a boost to see in writing just how much you accomplish every day.

We mothers, and now some of us grandmothers, need to recognize how vital we are to the peace, the Faith, and the continuing success of the family. In recognizing this, we might begin to see how important it is for us to stay mentally and emotionally healthy. While we all have high ideals, and should have high ideals, at the same time, we must not let our "failures" or "disappointments" make us "sick" or slow us down with continuing to try to achieve our daily goals.

The foundation of our mental and emotional health is a solid spiritual life that nourishes our hearts, and gives us the strength to accomplish all we have to do as homeschooling mothers.

Our Daily Graces

Jesus is so pleased with the decision that homeschooling families have made to trust in Him and to depend on Him for daily help in achieving our God-given goal of raising our children in the Catholic Faith, in the truths taught by Jesus.

We should remind ourselves frequently of the special gifts we received in the sacrament of matrimony. These gifts are given to us on a daily basis; they are not just something that was given once years ago. As you teach your children every day, hour by hour, you are receiving special graces from Jesus, and from His Blessed Mother.

Many saints, such as St. Bernadette and the three children of Fatima, revealed the overpowering happiness they experienced because of the strong love and care flowing



from the heart of the Blessed Mother. That overpowering love and care exists for you and comes to you every single day you teach your children, and passes through you to your children with every school assignment.

The graces that Jesus sends us, often through the outstretched hands of His mother, are countless. I sometimes think of the innumerable spiritual graces for us mothers as I look out my window and see the countless leaves on the countless trees covering the rolling hills of the Appalachian Mountains.

Some Spiritual Gems

Elizabeth Ann Seton took on the responsibility of teaching her own children long before she took on the responsibility of helping other children. When Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton began her teaching order, she took time to write spiritual gems for mothers. Perhaps the few I've included here will inspire you at the beginning of a new academic year because they come from a fellow homeschooling mother.

"Give some time every day, [even] if it is only half an hour, to devotional reading,

which is as necessary to the well-ordering of the mind as the hand of the gardener to prevent the weeds from destroying your favorite plants."

"Pray, pray incessantly, pray with fervor and with confidence. Be sincere in your wish to know the truth, and firm in your resolution to follow it."

"If we would please Him and be found among His children, we must learn what our duty is, pray to Him for the grace to do it, and then set our whole heart and soul to perform it."

"Patience and perseverance are the only ways to gain the blessings of Heaven."

"Blessed Guardians [Angels]... Help us to use well the grace of the moment in the care and instruction of the little ones under our charge. Watch over them with us."

Elizabeth Ann Seton, Homeschooling Mother, Pray for us.



Dr. Mary Kay Clark has been the Director of Seton Home Study School for more than 30 years. She writes columns for the *Seton Magazine* and is the author of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*.



your Questions ANSWERED

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

How can I make our fifth home-schooling year a little more exciting for the children?

Change the location. Ask your children for ideas about making the schoolroom a little different. You could choose a different room, or you could paint the room a different color and/or re-arrange the desks or seating arrangements. You might see about teaching the little ones in the dining room around a table, and have the older ones choose a sunny breakfast room. Before the cold sets in, consider classes on the porch outside, or at a picnic table! Consider having your high school student work at the library one afternoon a week.

Change the schedule. Start with a different subject in the morning. Assign oral book reports to be given to the family at dinnertime. Change the times for the household assignments.

Schedule physical activities between classes. Try art work or music, or putting on a load of laundry or washing the dishes between classes, or trying a new recipe for the family. In good weather, try a 15-minute break for tossing around a football or playing basketball.

Change the teacher. Have Dad teach a class, if not during the week, try Saturday or Sunday. The children and Dad will love it! Have an older child help with a younger child. A third or fourth grader could help a first grader with math or phonics. Schedule an older sibling as a teacher assistant to help a younger one in math or English.

What is most important to prepare for the new school year?

Having a plan and starting out as scheduled will not only help you to feel in control, it will help your children see that you are, in fact, prepared and in control.

Your children look to you to be organized and thus help them to be organized. Even the youngest feel more comfortable when you are in control, and you have definite plans about what they should do, and when.

Make the lesson plans your best friend.

Make the lesson plans your best friend. Show your children the lesson plans, pointing out that there is a daily plan for them to succeed. Remind them that if something comes up, such as you being sick or needing to go to a doctor's appointment, the lesson plans are their guide. Help them to be as comfortable with the lesson plans as you are. You could have a "practice day" by asking the kids to do their lessons for a day as if you were not home. That way, no matter what happens, there will be a plan and school can keep going.

What is the most important ingredient for a successful homeschooling year?

Prayer. Start the day with your own prayer and meditation, even if it's only five minutes before you leave your bedroom. Begin the school day with prayer with your children and keep it up frequently all day long! Attend Mass almost every day with the children whenever possible.

Secondly, remind your children at least once a week if not daily, that our Catholic education is vital to reach our eternal reward in Heaven. Schooling at home means they will receive a Catholic education that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.

I have a young teenage son and a six-year-old son. Both resist me almost continually.

There are a couple of things you can try. One thing you might want to do is incentivize them to do their schoolwork. You might do this by giving rewards. Rewards can take many different forms. For example, suppose your six-year-old son likes to go to the pool. You can tell him that if he finishes his work by 2:00 pm that day you will take him to the pool. Sometimes financial incentives work well, especially for older students. You might tell your teenage son that he can have a dollar every day he finishes his work by a certain time. Besides money, screen time is often a great incentive.

You can also incentivize your children by having competitions. For example, you could have a math competition, in which the first one of your students to finish his math gets a prize.

One side benefit of using incentives and competitions is that you will find out how much work your students can really do. When a student dawdles and does not apply himself, it's hard to tell what he could actually do if he tried. But if a student really wants that dollar or that trip, and works diligently, but still cannot finish, then you know that there really is too much work for him.

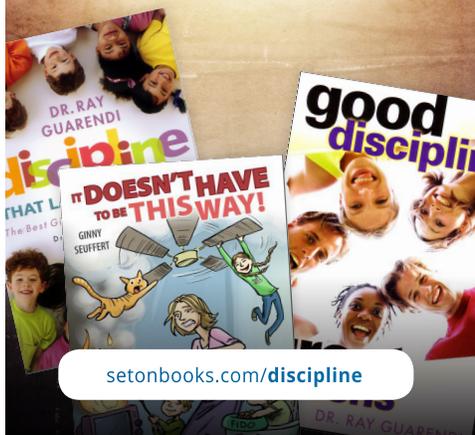
Another thing you might try, especially with your older student, is giving him as much input into controlling his own education as possible. For example, is he particularly interested in a certain subject (airplanes, the Civil War, paleontology, etc.)? If so, try as much as possible to work his interests into his schoolwork.

Sometimes when students resist doing their schoolwork it's because they see a rift between mom and dad on the subject. If

Good homeschooling often comes down to good discipline.

Give your children a safer, more stable environment, building character and virtues for a lifetime.

Check out some of our resources on discipline available through our online store!



mom is committed to homeschooling, but dad makes it known that he is not committed, the kids can pick up on that and resist. If the kids think that dad is opposed to homeschooling, or just not committed, it's good to have dad talk to the kids and emphasize how important their schoolwork is and tell them that he expects them to do their best. If your husband is able to teach one subject, that might be a good way to get him involved and be a good change of pace for your students.

If the problem is not limited to schoolwork, but is about discipline in general, you might want to check out some of the discipline books available through Seton Educational Media (www.setonbooks.com).

Can I homeschool successfully if I work part-time?

It won't be easy, but we have letters from moms who live a life of constantly balancing a job and homeschooling. Though they are stretched, they know they are keeping the children safe from anti-Catholic ideas and unsafe situations. These moms teach the older ones how to help the younger ones with assignments, and often involve grandparents, aunts and uncles, or close friends with tutoring help or financial help.

Organization is always important to successful homeschooling, but when you are

working and teaching, it becomes even more paramount. You and the children need to have a daily schedule, and you all need to stick to it as closely as possible. The schedule needs to have a firm time for waking up, for eating, for doing the homeschooling, and for chores. If you have older children, you may need to lean heavily on one or two of them. It may not exactly be "fair," but everyone will need to be contribute what they can.

When making the schedule, include your children in the planning. You don't want to impose the schedule on your children, but rather meet with them and figure out what is best together. Giving the children some input and control over the schedule will help them stick to it.

There's no doubt it is challenging when mom has to work, and some days are better, some not so good. Praying together as a family is essential, as is everyone understanding why your family has adopted the homeschooling lifestyle. You should explain, at least to the older children, why you are putting forth the effort that you are. If they are honest with themselves, they will likely realize that your homeschool is a far better place for them than their local public high school.

How should I prepare to teach three children and a pre-schooler?

Consider taking a day to go through a school day with each child on an individual basis. Take Monday with the oldest child and go through all the lessons and all the books. Point out the tests and what kinds of information he will be expected to know. Take Tuesday for the second child, go through a typical school day for him. The third child will be looking for his turn on Wednesday.

As you do these overviews, be sure to include who will be doing which household chores, such as putting on a load of laundry, taking the laundry out of the dryer, putting the dishes in the dishwasher, taking a turn with babysitting. Be sure each child has his name marked on his or her own cup to reduce constant washing of many cups a day! Don't have more dishes and silverware available than the number of people in the family.



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The Seton College Partner Program is a way to encourage students to continue their Catholic education by attending solidly Catholic Colleges after high school.



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Wisdom in God's Country



"I Wish We'd Found Seton Earlier!"

An Interview with the Mayrose Family

"Will's self-confidence is through the roof now. The frustration and anxiety he used to feel is gone. No child can absorb and truly learn if he or she is frustrated or anxious."



Why is homeschooling important to your family?

Homeschooling is important to our family because it gives us the flexibility and freedom we need to excel in our careers, do charity work, travel, attend sporting events, concerts, Boy Scouts and still give our son, Will, an excellent Catholic education.

What made you choose Seton Home Study School?

My husband and I researched all the homeschool options available, during Will's sophomore year of high school. We decided that Seton Home Study School met all of our criteria (and we have very high standards).

What sold us on Seton is that there is a Special Services division. Will was struggling in his traditional Catholic high school because he is severely ADD. He could not keep up the pace. We decided to make the change to Seton because the curriculum accommodates Will's needs.

With Seton, Will has the extra time he needs to complete tasks and school work. Given the extra time, Will has not only met our academic expectations, he has exceeded them.

How has Seton Home Study School benefited your family?

Seton has brought us closer together as a family. The stress and pressure we all felt in regard to Will's education has virtually

vanished. We have all learned better time-management skills.

As the parents of a 21-year old daughter, Madeleine, and Will, who is 17, it is easy to lose touch. Since Will started his education with Seton, it has sparked us all to get involved. We end up discussing the work with Will, once he completes it. We have a great time! The lines of communication as a family are open and everyone hears and listens to one another.

Is there an educational challenge that Seton Home Study School has helped your family to overcome?

Yes! Seton has helped Will to overcome time-management problems. Since he works part-time, he has learned to prioritize tasks. If he is running short on time, he does the easier work first and then blocks out more time for work that is more difficult. Seton's curriculum allows for this.

If Will doesn't understand a concept, we don't move on until he thoroughly understands that concept. Will's self-confidence is through the roof now. The frustration and anxiety he used to feel is gone. No child can absorb and truly learn if he or she is frustrated or anxious.

What do you like most about Seton Home Study School?

We like that Seton has a Special



Services division because of the flexibility and freedom the curriculum allows. Even more so, we like that Will does not have to keep up with anyone else. He is only in competition with himself, to do his personal best.

We like that Seton's curriculum is challenging, but fun and interesting at the same time. It is straightforward. What could be easier? The curriculum is all laid out for us. All we have to do is follow it to a successful conclusion.

Will has never been happier. He is interested in his school work again. When Will is interested, his ADD seems to disappear like magic! Will is able to focus so much better and for longer. The results are clearly shown in his grades from this past year at Seton.

What role does your Catholic faith play in your schooling and family life?

Our Catholic faith is extremely important to us. Will was so excited to be confirmed this year. Will was ready and anxious years ago, but our archdiocese pushed the age back to the junior/senior year of high school.

Will wanted a homeschool where he could practice and continue to learn about his Catholic faith, just as he did at his traditional Catholic high school. We were already familiar with many of the religious textbooks that Seton publishes, so we knew

we couldn't go wrong! Will takes many of the things he has learned in his Seton religion classes to CYO and shares it with others. Will has learned why we are Catholic and why we say and do the things we do. His Catholic faith is so much more meaningful to him, since Seton.

How does a homeschooling day go in your family?

We are all up between 6 and 6:30 a.m. daily. Will and Madeleine know that it's their responsibility to feed our two dogs and 3 cats before they feed themselves!

School starts immediately after breakfast and goes until 10 a.m. Then everyone goes to work. Our homeschooling session works for us because we all work, including Will. He works part-time on the maintenance staff at a local football stadium. Will also works as a stagehand, as needed in the evenings for local shows and events.

We start up again with school work around 2 p.m. and go until 5 p.m. Then we will pick it up after dinner and finish whatever work did not get done. School is also in session for a few hours on Saturday mornings and we review religion on Sundays, after Mass.

Do you have any beginning-of-the-school-year habits or rituals?

The first thing we do at the beginning of each new school year is to buy all new school supplies. It gives us a clean slate. We start

fresh. We don't dwell on school life before Seton or any past mistakes. We clean Will's room, especially his desk. We make sure that everything he needs is within easy reach. We believe that if you set yourself up to succeed, you will. A positive attitude is the key to a successful school year.

What is one piece of advice you could give to other homeschooling families?

If you get behind, don't get discouraged and don't give up. Don't panic. Just keep calm and go back to the work. Break it into smaller chunks if you have to. Sometimes children are overwhelmed when they see all their work before them at one time. "Slow but steady wins the race!"

I always ask the kids: "How do you eat an elephant?" They chime back with "one bite at a time!" We have gotten behind many times during the school year and have had to regroup and start again. The important thing is that we do regroup and start again. We don't give up when the going gets tough.

We are thrilled that Will excelled with Seton his junior year. He went from a "C" student to an "A" student (with the exception of one B). He is looking forward to his senior year in high school. Our only regret is that we didn't discover Seton earlier. He has never had so much fun learning before and the whole family has had fun along the way.



5 Creative Ways to Make Back to School Exciting for Everyone!

BY SETON STAFF

It's that time of year again. For most of us, the school year will begin in just a few short weeks, and even if you're a year-round schooler, it's likely that you're at least thinking about the next level of academic undertaking for your family.

Back to school can be a time of mixed feelings. There's some excitement for the beginning of a new adventure, but there's often

a fair bit of sadness that the summer has ended and perhaps a little trepidation over the challenges ahead. In a way, you might actually be dreading that first day of school; if you are, consider one of the following alternative ways to begin a new school year. You might be surprised how excited to return to school the family becomes.



1. Redecorate

Set your start date a week early and make that first week your time to create a whole new classroom or study area. No need to fear this will cost money. It needn't cost more than the price of a gallon of paint and the effort of shopping the attic, basement, and

garage of your own home. The value of having a new and dedicated workspace, however, is priceless.

We all know how much easier it is to work in a clean and organized environment. How about a cheerful space decorated to your own taste? Your kids will positively look forward to a new school year and doing their lessons every day when they get to spend time in a fun new space at their own little desk or table on the ugly yellow chair they discovered in a corner of the basement. Let them choose pictures from old textbooks or educational magazines to frame for the walls and hang a map from the last family vacation. The kids can make signs with their names for their own sections of the room to help personalize their areas and invest their interest.

Of course, you're probably thinking "where am I supposed to get this 'new' schoolroom?" It doesn't actually have to be a room at all; it

can be a hallway, corner of a room, or even a series of bookshelves. On the other hand, don't overlook the possibility of making over an actual room. Do you really use your formal dining room all that much? Can you revise the bedroom arrangement? If all they do is sleep there, it's possible the kids could go with more of a dormitory arrangement and free up a room for educational pursuits. Get creative, get the kids involved, and get excited for a new school year.



2. Buy A New Wardrobe

Just like a new space, new clothes can work wonders for one's attitude. Again, this doesn't have to cost much money, but getting new clothes can be a good way to motivate kids for class. Many homeschooling moms

actually invest in real old-fashioned private school uniforms, but if that doesn't suit your taste or your budget, there are alternatives.

Go to a discount store or a second-hand shop and let the children pick a few new clothes that will become their school clothes. These new outfits will be just for class and not for anything else, and the kids will be thrilled to hit the books again if it means they get to wear their new wardrobe.

If you are interested in providing uniforms for your children, but you don't have the finances to support that kind of investment, you can still create a uniform of your own by shopping the aforementioned sorts of stores. It doesn't have to be plaid skirts and khaki pants either (though it can be), so long as it's actually uniform, meaning the same for everybody. You'll be surprised at how well a uniform works to keep the kids motivated and focused on school.

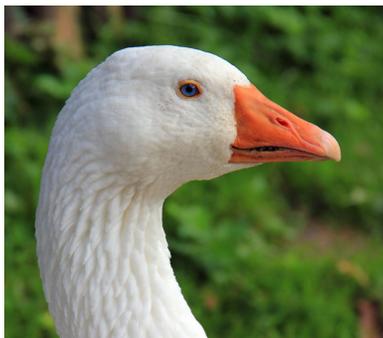


3. Pre-Schedule Rewards

Sometimes it can be a whole lot easier to push through something challenging when you know there's a reward around the bend. Try scheduling some fun activities every three

weeks or so to celebrate the milestones and achievements of completing that much school.

Let the children have a say and make sure Dad gets involved too. Movie and popcorn nights, board game nights, ice cream outings, a day trip, a barbecue, and any number of other activities planned out in advance can go a long way toward motivating everyone to get started and keep going.



4. Pick a Unit Study

Unit studies are a series of educational activities centered around a particular theme or topic, say geography or birds. They can be an incredibly fun way for the whole family to learn together, and are surprisingly easy to do.

Some people hear the words "unit study" and panic because to them, the term means expending a great deal of effort to research and craft a whole section of curriculum with no help or guidance. Here's the secret though. Unit studies are not something you have to teach, so much as facilitate. They should arise out of strong interests already present in your kids, and should be viewed as a family activity in the same way that riding bikes together, story time, and/or any other routine family occupation is approached. Once a topic has been identified, all it takes is accumulating a small bank of resources for pursuing learning in that area, and you're set.

So, if one were to take geography as a unit study, for instance, American geography would be a good place to start. A physical

map, a political map, and a topographical map would go far toward providing study opportunities, such as memorizing capitals, learning landmarks, and plotting routes to different destinations. Students could keep track of the places discussed in their regular studies and the literature they read, and these could be marked on the maps. There are wonderful books filled with beautiful pictures of our national parks that could be found at local libraries, used book stores, or websites such as amazon.com. Fact books about each state are also readily available. Together, these few items would be enough to generate material for an entire year of fun and adventure.

5. Build Tool Kits for Each Child

Children like to have treasure boxes, and they get very excited about having their own tools for different activities, whether that's their own baking kits, workshop tools, or pens and pencils. Leverage that trait for motivating your children to do schoolwork by working with each of them to create a personalized school kit.



Get a brightly colored box for each child, and help him stock it with pens and pencils of his own choice. Provide packs of different colored index cards for each student, unique erasers and pencil sharpeners, and whatever special tools each student might need for his or her particular classes this year (for instance, a compass for your geometry student or a graphing calculator for your algebra student). Don't forget to include something fun, such as a field guide to birds or reptiles, a Rubik's cube, or origami paper, whatever would most appeal to that particular child. Make sure to include a holy card of each student's patron saint and a rosary.

Depending on how creative you and your children want to be, the kids could be allowed to make their own boxes with some wood, paint, stencils, stickers, and any other raw materials you have on hand. Re-purposing shoeboxes would work well for such a project. No matter how you do it, though, a new toolbox full of everything a student will need for the upcoming academic year will make a fun project before school begins, and something enjoyable to anticipate each day as you go.

Don't let the challenge of a new year overwhelm you. Take the bull by the horns, and decide that this year, school is going to be fun and exciting for everyone. Have a back to school party to celebrate another academic year, pick one of the projects we've listed here, and jump in with both feet. It's going to be a great year!

Why Is 'Happiness' all You Catholics Talk About?

BY JOHN CLARK

All my life, I have heard people make the claim that the Catholic Church does not let its members “have any fun.” They seem to view—or at least claim to view—the Catholic Church as an institution that exists for the purpose of making sure that no one is happy. Hearing this nonsense, even our own children may begin listening to it. However, for a serious student of the Catholic Faith, the irony of this “no fun” position is immediately obvious; the truth is that we Catholics are unapologetically focused on happiness.

Begging the question with a phony interrogative, they ask, “Why is it that all you Catholics talk about is the sixth and ninth commandments?” But this query is normally posed either by a guilty conscience or by one who has never been formally introduced to the Catholic Faith. The truth is that if one looked at the totality of two millennia of Catholic literature, it is the subject of happiness that keeps appearing and appearing. It is the first chapter and the last chapter of the Catholic canon.

What the student of the Catholic Faith would be more appropriate to ask is: “Why is it that all you Catholics talk about is happiness?” That would be a real question. Of course, there is an answer, and it’s a pithy one at that. The answer is that there is no happiness apart from God. More positively phrased, we could answer that with God in Heaven, there is only happiness: an unblemished, unmistakable, and unwavering sort of fulfilling happiness that the greatest philosophers cannot come close to conceiving in their finest flashes of brilliance.

Of course, moderns are often so focused on “fun” that they cast aside the aspiration of true happiness. As C. S. Lewis put it, “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about

with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Criticize us if you will, but we Catholics are not easily pleased. We want something more. Infinitely more. We want the happiness that only God’s love can bring. We want the love that only brings happiness. Forgive us if we want to share that love with others because we are so excited about it. Forgive us if, when we see someone limiting his happiness to making mud pies in a slum, we want to tell him that one day, when all transient things have passed and only the transcendent remains, we will meet again in a place where the absence of time meets the presence of the loving caress of our Creator.

Our mission is to recognize that happiness is our final goal, our destiny, or as the scholastic theologians put it, our “end.” If you read the writings of the great theologians of the middle ages, you notice that this is a consistent theme.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke about this a few years ago in relation to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure: *“Consequently St Thomas and St Bonaventure define the human being’s final goal, his complete happiness in different ways. For St Thomas the supreme end, to which our desire is directed is: to see God. In this simple act of seeing God all problems are solved: we are happy, nothing else is necessary.”*

Instead, for St Bonaventure the ultimate destiny of the human being is to love God, to encounter him and to be united in his and our love. For him this is the most satisfactory definition of our happiness.”

While Thomas and Bonaventure differed

on a point of emphasis, they agreed upon the eschatology of happiness—that the complete fulfillment of happiness is found in God. Though for a variety of reasons, happiness often eludes us in this life, it will be eternally ours in the next.

As Christian parents, what does this mean to us? What is the practical application of this teaching about happiness to our children? Very simply, it means that we cannot broadly teach our children about Christianity without illustrating a direct and unmistakable link to eternal happiness. Happiness is no mere footnote to our faith; indeed, Christianity is about happiness. Too often, we Catholic parents have forgotten this truth. We neglect to teach our children that happiness awaits us at the end of the journey, then wonder why our children take detours along the way.

Many years ago, St. Augustine wrote: “To fall in love with God is the greatest romance; to seek him the greatest adventure; to find him, the greatest human achievement.” Make no mistake: the corollary is that to fall out of love with God is the worst divorce; the refusal to seek Him the worst nightmare; to lose Him, the greatest tragedy. Every one of us takes a different journey, but in the end, there are only two destinations.

Our children need to be—deserve to be—taught the truth about happiness. May the Holy Spirit grant us the grace to unapologetically teach the apologetic of happiness to our children. And to everyone else.

Read John Clark’s weekly blog at setonmagazine.com/johnclark



John Clark, a Christendom College graduate, holds a degree in Political Science and Economics. He is a popular writer and speaker at family and homeschooling conferences.

The Secret to ‘Thank You Mom’ When We See a School Bus

BY MARY DONELLAN

“Thank you, Mom!” we chorus from our respective seats in the minivan as we rumble through our small hometown on a colorful spring afternoon.

Well, actually it’s not quite a chorus. It’s more like a miscuing choir.

The first kid to spy The Thing out our slightly dirty van window proclaims a slightly triumphant *thank-you-Mom* (as in, “I saw it first!”), and one by one the rest of us fall in behind him in uneven rhythm.

So the sound that actually hits our poor mother’s eardrums is more like “Thank you Mo—thank you mo—thank you mooom.”

Our Little Tradition

You ask: what’s *The Thing Out the Window* inspiring these declarations of our gratitude?

It’s big. It’s yellow. It’s flashing.

Yes, it’s the famed Vehicle from Another World, that Mysterious Cruising Ship of Public Education . . . the School Bus.

At each sighting of these landmarks-on-wheels, we shout, “Thank you, Mom!”

This is our little tradition. I’m not sure how it began or who began it. That fact is lost in the misty haze of earlier homeschooling years. But it’s nevertheless survived culling from our clan’s manifold little customs, and it exists to this day.

We thank our mother each and every time we see a school bus. Now, I’ll admit it gets interesting when we drive by a public school parking lot just before dismissal. I once counted thirty-one hyper “Thank you!” rapidly ejected from my brother’s grinning mouth, machine-gun style.

But numbers don’t stop us. We thank her every time . . . because she has more than earned it.

And so have you, dear homeschooling mom. Through your heroic love and service, you’ve earned a litany of profound *thank yous*. So, immerse yourself in my family tradition for a moment, and pretend you’re driving past three big school buses, all in a row . . .

You Keep Us With You

Thank you Mom! Thank you, because you refuse to send us into the uncharted, often untrustworthy realm of the School Bus and all that lies beyond the neighborhood curb on a weekday morning.

You don’t push us out of the comforting and empowering shelter of your presence when we need you most (even if, admittedly, we don’t realize it sometimes).

You never subject us to the conversations, exposures, and atmospheres that would be destructive to our spiritual and physical well-being. Rather, you keep us with you. Of course, you open the blinds and gather us sleepyheads into the kitchen for breakfast on these school mornings like any other mom. But you do it, fully aware that our joyous but chaotic presence is only the beginning of your day, no matter how tired or overwhelmed you are. And that’s what makes you a heroine.

You Embrace Your Vocation

Thank you Mom! Thank you for sacrificing what the world says is important for you. Thank you for embracing your hidden, difficult, grace-filled vocation.

Thank you for living in our home, a place where makeup-less days, spit-up accidents, tearful math lessons, dirty boys smilingly carrying insects inside from the yard, and no easy dinner plan in sight are often involved.

You are becoming a hidden saint while we, your children, throw ever-new challenges, sorrows, and joys at you like a hundred whizzing baseballs for you to catch all at once. But you’re a brilliant catcher. Everyone should learn from you.

You Teach Us How to Love

Thank you, Mom! Thank you for educating our minds and cultivating our souls. Your hands are the hands God designed for this formation; your heart is the heart we most need. You love us more than we can imagine; you give us countless gifts we never realize or see.

Thank you for claiming our home as a school of virtue and claiming us from the world as children of God.

Thank you for perceiving the world as the battlefield it truly is and training us to be soldiers for His kingdom through the mundane and ordinary school day, when you could be out building a lucrative career or enjoying more relaxing pleasures.

You embrace the difficult way of life because it is the best way. You teach us how to love in faithfulness, generosity, and compassion. Our flaws are always overshadowed by the noble daily sacrifice of love you make for us.

In closing, dear homeschooling mom, I give you a challenge: every time you pass a flashing yellow school bus (while you drive a minivan full of your noisy, messy kids), let it be a reminder of all you have given in love, and all the holy treasure you will one day receive.



Mary Donellan is a mercifully blessed homeschool graduate in the Southern USA. She spends her hours humming in the laundry room, cherishing her loved ones, reading voraciously, soaking in music, and adoring her Lord at Latin Mass.

Galvanized by Love

Finding the Zeal to Homeschool

BY FR. STEPHEN MCGRAW

After an infant Baptism in the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, the priest gives a blessing to fathers that includes the following words: “*With their wives they will be the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith. May they be also the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do, in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

I am prompted by these words to recall the example of my own father, a cradle Catholic from North Dakota (Mom, a California girl, was still a bit “new”, having come into the Church six years or so after their marriage).

Though we had religion class daily at our Catholic school, Dad nonetheless took seriously his role as our first teacher in the ways of faith and would school us each Sunday through the questions and answers of the old *Pope St. Pius X Catechism*. Through this means (as well as through the nightly Rosary and a host of other ways), he and his wife handed on the torch of faith to their children in an utterly irreplaceable way.

A Great Commission

This summons to be the first teachers of your child, especially in the Catholic faith, is indeed a great commission, but as every Catholic parent must realize, it is a daunting one! Pope St. John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, on *Catechesis in our Time*, stated, “Every catechist should be able to apply to himself the mysterious words of Jesus: ‘My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me.’” The Holy Father then comments: “What assiduous study of the word of God transmitted by the Church’s magisterium, what profound familiarity with Christ and with the Father, what a spirit of prayer, what detachment from self must a catechist have in order that he can say, ‘My teaching is not mine!’”

I think, however, that most of you do not need much intellectual convincing as to the

greatness of your vocation as parents and teachers of the children entrusted to you. More likely, the faculty of your soul that requires the most help in this matter is your will, in order to overcome obstacles, perhaps of fear or despondency, that make the task even more arduous than it already is, in and of itself. As St. Josemaria Escriva would say, you have need to “beg for fortitude every day” in the face of this noble mission, this life project to which you have been called.

But something more than gritty determination is necessary if we are not only to do the will of God but, as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton said, “to do it in the manner he wills.” I propose to you that God wills you to accomplish this great task of homeschooling your children with a zealous and enthusiastic spirit, even though that zeal will inevitably flag at times and the joy in your spirit be reduced to a flicker.

But whence comes this zeal or enthusiasm for the great task that lies before you? One crucial requirement is told to us by St. Teresa of Avila. She expresses her conviction that it is impossible to have enthusiasm for great things unless we come to see how we are favored by God, and how he is constantly replenishing in us the graces that we are losing by our sins.

St. Teresa was convinced that in addition to a lively faith, it was necessary to have a pledge of his love. You must come to an awareness, then, of the truth that you, personally, are favored with His love, and you, personally, must have a pledge of this love that you make our own and hold on to.

A Pledge of His Love

Maybe this pledge of His love comes through the grace of an encounter with Christ, whether this grace comes by way of



a particular religious experience or whether it dawns on us through ordinary prayer and reflection.

Maybe it comes through loving converse with Our Lord, whether hanging on a cross that is displayed before our eyes or hidden under the appearance of bread in the Blessed Sacrament (and don’t worry if it feels like just a one-way conversation, that’s normal!). In such moments, we can glimpse the great truth of His favor.

There, He whispers to us what He said to the Apostles: “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you, many prophets and kings longed to see what you see and did not see it!”

We must come then to grasp that, even though God shows no partiality, at the same time, He mysteriously loves us with a love of predilection, with a preferential love, even as a bridegroom loves His bride.

And in grasping how He favors us (yes, sometimes, even especially with crosses!), we can be helped to have enthusiasm for the great things that He is calling us to do for His glory and for the salvation of souls.



Fr. Stephen F. McGraw, graduated from Christendom College with a B.A. in History. He has been active as a Spiritual Director for the Legion of Mary and in Hispanic ministry, and has been a speaker at national home-schooling conferences.

MENTAL VISUALIZATION

HOW TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

BY CHRISTOPHER SMITH

When I was a young lad, my father decided it would be a good idea to teach me how to golf. I am sure he did this out of love, but I still question his decision to this day. I can think of few activities that are more brutally destructive to the psyche of the beginner, as well as that of the instructor.

The fact that we still speak to each other is a small miracle. Granted, most of our strife had to do with my still uncontrolled temper and general lack of virtue as a 7 year old, but we worked through it.

There was one particular lesson that sunk in between the screaming and club throwing that ultimately led to my grasping the sport (Yes, golf is sport, so stop snickering). My father told me to visualize where I wanted the ball to go, to stare down the fairway to the actual point. His reasoning was not a practice in New Age meditation, but a belief that by focusing on that point in my mind, going through the steps I would physically need to accomplish for my ball to hit that exact spot, the body would naturally follow suit. And by golly, it worked! And I believe this principle works not just in sports, but in all aspects of life.

Again, this act of visualization is not some bizarre and foreign concept. As humans, what we practice internally manifests itself

outwardly. A good example would be living a life of virtue. The more we habituate good acts, the easier it becomes to remain virtuous.

And many of the instances of practicing virtue are internal exercises, a visualization of reaching the goal of virtuous action. With this view of human nature, it is not hard to see why focusing internally on any life goal will make that goal easier to achieve, be it virtue or academic success.

With many of you students returning to your schooling in the next few months, I would suggest that you take my dad's advice and apply it to the upcoming year.

Wherever you are in your schooling, there are always goals to achieve: increasing your GPA, crushing the SAT, getting that

scholarship to your dream college. These are the points you should be focusing on now, down the fairway so to speak. Think out the steps you will need to take to achieve these goals, go over them in your mind regularly.

I guarantee that this will be beneficial in actually carrying out the steps needed to meet these goals.



Christopher Smith is the Director of Guidance at Seton. He has an M.A. in National Security and Statecraft from the Institute of World Politics in Washington D.C. He has a B.A. in Philosophy from Christendom College.

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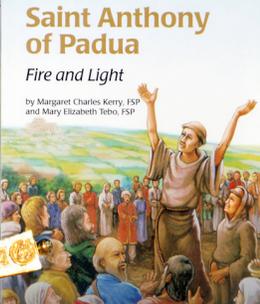
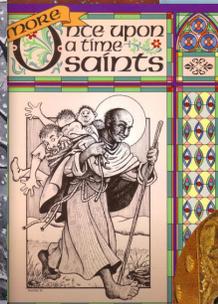
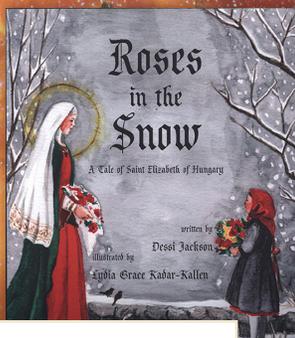
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The Horizon of God

Dear friends, on days that are busy and full of problems, but also on days of rest and relaxation, the Lord asks us not to forget that if it is necessary to be concerned about material bread and to replenish our strength, it is even more fundamental to develop our relationship with Him, to reinforce our faith in the One who is the "bread of life" which satisfies our desire for truth and love. May the Virgin Mary, on the day on which we recall the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome, sustain us on our journey of faith.

Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Message, August 5, 2012

