



Catholic Church and School

They say that there are two things in life that we must ALWAYS do: Die and pay taxes. I'd like to add a third thing that we must always do, and that is to take out the trash.

No matter who you are, no matter what you do, you have to take out the trash. Even priests need to empty wastebaskets sometimes. I've been taking out the trash since I was about 6 or 7 years old. My brother and I had to take turns every other week taking out the trash. Now my brother really did not like doing this and he would sometimes stand in the wastebasket in order to smash it down and compact it so he didn't need to empty it as often. Sometimes he would tear holes in the bottom so that when he finally did carry it out, it was spilling onto the ground. He would have to go back to clean up the yard and chase down the dog to retrieve it all. He sometimes spent more time avoiding taking out the trash than if he had just taken it out.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is taking out the trash. It says that He cast out an unclean spirit. Jesus took the trash out of people and Jesus still helps us clean up our own lives.

He also told the demon to be quiet. It was kind of like tying up the trash bag. When you tie up the bag you can't see or smell the trash inside. So that is kind of what Jesus was doing: He didn't want the unclean spirit showing itself or smelling up the synagogue.

Throughout the Gospels, unclean spirits and demons recognize Jesus as the "Holy One of God" and Jesus always commands them to be quiet. Demons are liars. Jesus did not want liars teaching people about Him. Demons are trash talkers. Although they address Him as the "Holy One" and "Son of God", they may have well been doing it in a sarcastic or a taunting way, misusing God's name. Jesus did not want to talk trash with them.

When Jesus began His ministry He was teaching in the synagogue, a place like our church. Sometimes people were there who had problems. Some were sick in their bodies and had diseases. Some were sick in their minds and were confused. Some were sick in their souls, in their spirits. They had unclean spirits. Unclean spirits could be real demons or, just as likely, the sins of the people. They had trash on the inside and, by coming to "church" in the synagogue, Jesus helped them to take out the trash!

Jesus still helps us with our unclean spirits today. When you and I *sin* it is like standing in the wastebasket like my brother used to do. What trash do we have inside of us? When we get angry and lose patience, we are carrying trash. When we are mean or unforgiving or hurt someone's feelings, we are carrying trash. If we say bad words – especially misusing God's name like those demons – we are carrying trash. But Jesus can help us! He wants to help us clean up our lives. He wants us to repent and ask him for forgiveness in order to take out the trash.

That is why we have the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It's available year-round, not just Advent and Lent. Don't let the trash pile up for six months or a year or even longer, but take it out regularly. There is a place to take it. It's called the Reconciliation room, which is like the dumpster to take your sins. And there is a garbage man in Reconciliation. He's called a priest. The priest acts in the person of Jesus, Who is still with us and still able to cast out those unclean spirits with authority.

Authority – We don't always value authority in our culture and world. We see it as limiting our freedom, but authority has necessity and purpose in our lives and world.

It says in the Gospel that Jesus was "teaching with authority". Authority means: "Power assigned to another". It means power to give commands. Jesus's authority was different because, while the scribes were quoting the Word of God, Jesus *is* the Word of God. The scribes were quoting another but Jesus was quoting Himself! The authority of Jesus was obviously higher. Jesus was over-qualified and the people knew it.

The Church continues that very same teaching authority of Jesus. We believe that Jesus left us His Church as a means of continuing his teaching, to uphold His unchanging commands in a changing world. Commandments are necessary because they give boundaries. People need boundaries. You and I need boundaries to know who we are. I sometimes speak to people who don't really know who they are and much of the problem lies in disregarding authority and not having boundaries.

How do you know what the state of Indiana is? It is by its boundaries. If you go too far and you cross a certain boundary then you leave Indiana and enter Ohio. You risk losing your status as a Hoosier and may become a Buckeye unless you come back to Indiana! That's what God's commandments and His Church teachings do as well, they set boundaries. They tell us that if you cross that that boundary of that 7th commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," then you become a thief. That is who you are. If you cross that boundary of the 8th commandment, "Thou shalt not lie," then you become a liar. If you continue to cross these boundaries without coming back through Reconciliation then you risk losing your status as a saint and becoming forever a sinner.

The Pope and the Church continue the teaching authority of Jesus in the world around us. That teaching is carried on in a very special way through Catholic education.

I encourage all parents to make sure your children associate somehow with other Catholic young people – either in Catholic schools, or religious education, or youth groups. Involvement with other Catholic young people is important not just for education in the faith but also for socializing with other Catholic young people. Sociologists have documented that Catholics are likelier to attend Mass if they live in a heavily Catholic neighborhood. It can be a healthy peer pressure. It's like a monkey-see, monkey-do.

When almost everyone around you is Catholic, you're more comfortable being Catholic and acting like one. The same goes for any characteristic. If you're around people who share a particular characteristic, it will be reinforced. It can work for good or bad. If you're around people who cuss, you're more likely to cuss. If you're around people who pray, you're more likely to pray.

When you and I are around other Catholics, we discuss things like Mass, confession, and what we give up for Lent, etc. We talk about which parishes have the best Mass, Translation: shortest Mass. We get together and whine about fasting on Fridays. It keeps our Catholic faith in our minds and our hearts.

We are in the midst of celebrating Catholic Schools in particular and Catholic education in general. The teaching authority of Jesus through His Church certainly must be an important part of the education and formation of all young people. The teachings of Jesus through His Church draw all people, especially young people, closer to Jesus. It helps them to practice their faith more easily and it may even get them to do their chores around the house more faithfully, chores like taking out the trash.

*Fr. David Ruppert at St. Anthony de Padua Church, South Bend, Indiana
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