

Paige Porter

In the first reading Paul states, "Love does not seek its own interests". This quote reminded me of a retreat I attended last summer for my high school when the students were posed a question, "What is love?" At the time, I could not answer this question. However, when I traveled to Rome this past December on a pilgrimage, I was able to see the answer more clearly. As we walked through the catacombs of St. Calistus, I was able to see the immense number of tombs of past Christians. Thousands of tombs that lay deep under the Earth represented the incredible faith that Christians displayed. And as we visited the crypts of St. Francis, St. Claire, and St. Cecilia, I was able to see how these individuals had given their life for what they believed in, trying to share that belief with those around them. That was love. Their willingness to be entirely selfless and to do everything in their power so that others could experience God's grace represented love. The tombs of past Christians and the martyrs I have mentioned did not seek to better themselves; they sought to spread God's love and to introduce others to his forgiving ways.

The teachers that I have had at St. Cecilia displayed this mentality as well, doing everything in their power to help the students succeed not only in the classroom, but in everyday life as well. While attending St. Cecilia, my teachers aimed to create a fun and exciting learning environment. In fifth grade, Mr. Fong taught us a song that helped the class memorize the prepositions. To this day, I still find myself silently singing that song in class when I need to recall one of those crucial little words. Miss Daley fostered my love of reading with her consistent book reports, which invited me to discover new genres and to explore different types of literature. Students at St. Cecilia are also able to enhance their leadership skills through student council. Ms. Kays was always well organized and prepared fun and exciting activities for the student body to participate in.

As a student at St. Cecilia, I always sensed the inclusive environment the teachers tried to create through the various activities I participated in. As a shy kindergartener I was warmly welcomed into my new school environment by my eighth grade buddy. She was like a big sister to me and made the new school a little less scary and a lot more fun! And as my class prepared to graduate and go into high school, St. Cecilia gave us more opportunities to set an example for the younger grades. Eighth graders finally had their own kindergarten buddy and had an opportunity to become Commissioner General, a dream of almost every student at St. Cecilia because then you get to be on SCTV!

But throughout my years at St. Cecilia, I not only learned long division and read classic novels, I also learned about my faith and grew as a Christian. Faith was stressed throughout my education with yearly class Masses that correlated with what we were facing in life. Also, we received First Communion, Reconciliation, and Confirmation. The Confirmation program was stressed in and out of school and gave students a chance to interact with other children in the parish. During seventh and eighth grade, students participated on retreats with their classmates led by high school students. These retreats gave students an opportunity to focus on their faith for a few days with the relaxing environment of CYO camp helping them to forget their worries in the city.

Service was also an important aspect of my Catholic education. Students were required to complete service hours when they entered junior high. This gave students an opportunity to experience the incredible feeling one receives out of volunteering. For me,

the service I performed in grammar school has turned into a major part of my life. Beginning in sixth grade, I started helping with the Children's Faith Formation Program, focusing on the Pre-K and Kindergarten class. My sister and I eventually started teaching the class together and have continued to do so throughout high school. I love watching the children learn about their faith and interact with one another in the class.

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. My village has been the St. Cecilia Parish Community, and I am so grateful that I have been exposed to such a loving environment. As a small child, I was introduced to the Catholic faith by attending Sunday school, here, at St. Cecilia's. My parents made a lot of sacrifices so that I could continue my Catholic education at St. Cecilia's.

Over the course of my nine years in grammar school, I was able to experience the inclusive environment that the parish displays. From countless parish picnics, to parish festivals, and several retreats, this Catholic community takes a vested interest in each child. My experiences at St. Cecilia not only prepared me academically, but they also taught me important values and disciplines that I will live out for the rest of my life. As a graduating senior at Sacred Heart Cathedral, I plan to continue my Catholic education in college, and to take with me the values I learned at St. Cecilia.

My experiences at St. Cecilia have shown me that Catholic schools are the dividends for life providing each child with essential knowledge, values, discipline, and faith that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Thank you.

Jason Talavera

Good Morning. My name is Jason Talavera. Today I am here to share with you the role Catholic schools have played in my life.

From a young age, my focus has been on education, and as we heard in the state of the union speech Tuesday..."A good education is no longer a pathway to opportunity - it is a pre-requisite." I will discuss three ways Catholic schools have helped shape the person that I am today and helped me "share the light of Jesus": 1) built my foundation (faith, knowledge, discipline, morals) 2) strengthened my family bond 3) taught me to make the most of my opportunities.

1) Built my foundation. Saint Cecilia's School and St. Cecilia's Parish family have been formative in building who I am today. My parents sacrificed since kindergarten to allow me the opportunity and the privilege to receive a Catholic education. For me being a part of Saint Cecilia's family was important. I was

active in the school and participated in all sports, children's choir, altar server, Safety Patrol, and was Commissioner General. After graduation I was on the Confirmation team for four years, sexton, and recently returned from a pilgrimage to Rome with Msgr. Harriman, Paige, and other high school seniors. I also helped Msgr. Harriman form the youth group. Through these experiences I have gained knowledge, become closer to God, and they have helped form my moral foundation and self-discipline. I remember Mrs. Little, my 7th grade teacher, who helped me reach my potential. At first, I was just a regular student, but she knew I had the potential to excel and I accepted her challenge. This confidence allowed me to be elected Commissioner General. Being on Student Council, I remember Ms Kays and Mr. Ide who encouraged me to strive for excellence and as a result I developed leadership skills.

2) Strengthened my family. I went to school with seven relatives. We were nicknamed "the Clan" by Mrs. Connolly, if I am not mistaken. Our parents worked full-time, so we would be dropped off to our grandmother's house and then our grandmother would drive us to school in her Oldsmobile station wagon. She knew the importance of faith and would drive us to school early so we could make the 7:00am Mass everyday before school. We had to wait until everybody was ready to go home and many days that meant waiting till 4pm or later. As you can see, this helped me form a closer bond not only with my grandmother and brothers, but also with my cousins, my aunts, my parents and our entire family because of these shared experiences. Even today we still go to Mass as a family at 7:30 am then we go to our grandmothers house for Sunday brunch.

3) Taught me to make the most of my opportunities. There are a lot of students here today from kindergarteners, eighth graders, high school students and even those in college and in graduate school. To all students who are currently at St. Cecilia's, I encourage you to say thank you. Your parents make daily sacrifices for you to be privileged to attend this excellent school. There are many who wish they had the opportunity. Please make the most of what you are given. Spend extra time to understand what you are learning...help out your teachers who want only the best for you...realize that to those who much has been given much is expected.

I graduated from St. Cecilia's in 1992. I then went to one of the many outstanding Catholic high schools in San Francisco. I graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in business, received my medical degree from UC Davis and am currently a Resident Physician at California Pacific Medical Center pursuing Cardiology.

Thank you to the parishioners, the priests, and teachers of Saint Cecilia's, as well as current and former St. Cecilia students who have shared so many talents and experiences with me and allow me now to share the light of Jesus. Thank you.