

100th Anniversary of St. Mary's School celebrated

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WASHINGTON – Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington, Sept 13, celebrated Mass in honor of the 100th anniversary of St. Mary's School in Bryantown.

St. Mary's Elementary School was established in 1915 in two different buildings: one for white children and one for educating children of color in the surrounding communities of Bryantown. In 1923, St. Mary's also became the home of Notre Dame High School. The schools were integrated in the 1960s and the high school closed in 1967. All three schools were led by the School Sisters of Notre Dame from Baltimore, Md. for a total of approximately 80 years.

"The purpose of a Catholic school and certainly the reason why Bryantown can celebrate all three of its schools over the past century is found in the Gospel we just listened to today," said Cardinal Wuerl as he began his homily. In the Gospel today, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" to which Peter replies, "You are the Christ."

"Each one of us at some point in our life is able to make that same reply," said the cardinal, but to do that, we need to be introduced to Christ. "The Church brings to us today what it has brought to the world for two thousand years. It brings us the encounter with Jesus. It offers us an invitation to faith. It proclaims Christ's words of truth and life." But the cardinal continued, "It does this in a world not always prepared to hear and accept the message."

"At the heart of all of the schools that are a part of the history of this parish is Catholic identity. It exists to provide a structured context where students can experience what it means to say that each of us has a relationship with Christ and therefore, because of that, we share a bond with one another," said the cardinal. "Even those who do not share our faith come to this school because they know that at its heart there is the acceptance of values motivated by our faith – values that present a specific vision or view of human life."

The cardinal pointed out that Catholic school education is an opportunity not simply for the next level of academic preparation and broader social experience, but also for the development of an individual as a person of faith, virtue and culture. "For 100 years, these schools of Saint Mary's Parish have carried out the mission of being a witness to Jesus Christ. All of those associated with the school over a century have participated in the challenge to provide young people with an academically excellent education that includes their formation into the vision of life that flows from the Gospel."

"Today, we commit ourselves to the ongoing challenge of Catholic education that is focused on its Catholic identity, its academic excellence and, at the same time, thanks to the generosity of so many parishioners and benefactors, an education that is affordable to the young people of this parish and the surrounding neighborhoods. Just as we thank God for the gift of 100 years of Catholic education, so we also thank you, the members of this parish and its benefactors, for your commitment today to the ongoing task of Catholic education."

"Looking to the future of Catholic education, we should do so with hope, confidence and enthusiasm knowing that we bring something to those we teach that no one else can. We share the story of Jesus. May God bless you and all who support this school to help make the Church's vision of life and your dreams for the future come true," said the cardinal as he concluded his homily.

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