

Homily to Begin the Academic Year 2012-2013

**Marquette Catholic High School, Alton, Illinois
September 5, 2012**

**+ Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Father[s] and Deacon[s], faculty and staff, parents and students, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is customary at the start of a new school year to celebrate what we call a “Mass of the Holy Spirit.” Indeed, whenever we begin a new endeavor, it is good for us to call upon the aid of the Holy Spirit. It is He who will guide our steps and our thoughts and direct them to things that last and endure.

Each of us desires a certain level of stability, which we might ordinarily call predictability or certainty. We long to be certain of our parents’ love for us and of the loyalty of our friends; parents want to be certain of the good behavior of their children; teachers want to be certain of the honest work of their students; the list can easily go on.

In the midst of this changing world, there is only one thing of which we can always be certain: the great desire of the Lord to be with us and for us to be with him.

It was this confidence that motivated the short life of Father Jacques Marquette, S.J., after whom your school is named. When he was nineteen years of age, Jacques entered the Society of Jesus – more commonly known as the Jesuits. In 1666, then Father Marquette – was sent to what was known as New France for the evangelization of the North American Tribes. With a gift for languages, he quickly learned at least six different dialects and set to work.

After spending some time in Michigan, Father Marquette heard rumors of a great river that was useful for trade routes. After receiving the necessary permissions from his superiors to explore this river, he set out for the Mississippi River and met the Illinois Tribe at La Pointe, Michigan. The Illinois soon invited him to visit their territory and to teach them. Father Marquette willingly accepted their invitation because he knew that the Lord wanted to say to each of the tribes, “You shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezekiel 36:28).

Father Marquette sought to teach them to live in humility, gentleness, and patience, to live in a manner worthy of the call they received from the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:2, 1). Through his dedicated ministry, the Lord placed a new heart in the peoples of the New World (cf. Ezekiel 36:26).

In a letter he wrote in 1672, Father Marquette commented on his work as a missionary. "My only design," he said, "was to put them in the way of heaven; that for this alone I remained among them; that this obliged me to assist them at the peril of my life."¹ He put them in the path of heaven by teaching them to love like Jesus Christ, with humility and gentleness, for the Lord dwells with those who love (cf. Ephesians 4:2; John 14:23).

Parents, you are sacrificing much to send your children to Marquette Catholic High School, and for your sacrifice I offer my humble gratitude. You are sending your children to Marquette not only for a quality education, but – more importantly – to seek the assistance of the faculty and staff in your mission – which you accepted at your children's baptism – to put and keep them on the way to heaven. To this end, the faculty and staff need you to live the faith at home in its fullness. They need you to show the importance of Sunday Mass, of daily prayer, and of faithful discipleship through the example of your own daily living.

Teachers and staff, regardless of your role in this school or of the subject you teach, you are very much a part of the mission of this school to put and keep your students on the way to heaven.

I am glad you have chosen to teach here and I thank you. I ask you to help your students to know the Lord better through each of the subjects you teach. No subject or discipline is removed from theology because knowledge of the created world always leads to knowledge of the Creator.

To you, my dear young people, I now turn my attention. I am happy to be here among you today as you begin your new school year. Even with the delayed beginning, some of you may not yet be ready to return and some of you may have been longing for this day for some weeks now.

You are studying here at Marquette Catholic High School not simply to learn about science and math and English and art, but also – and above all – to learn about Jesus Christ. But your religion classes are not simply about learning *about* Jesus Christ but about coming to *know* him more closely and to living your life as one of his followers. For this to happen, you must be open to knowing him and allow him to know you; your teachers cannot force you to know and follow him; this you must choose to allow a heart of stone to give way to a heart of flesh (cf. Ezekiel 36:26). If you are always open to the Lord and to his ways, you will never be disappointed.

Today we are asking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon your studies because it is he who “will teach you all things and remind you of all that [Jesus] told [us]” (John 14:26). Call upon the Holy Spirit each day to assist you with his gifts of wisdom and of understanding that your studies may be fruitful and lead you closer to God.

Those who draw close to God remain joyful and content because the Lord is our one true and lasting happiness; he alone can satisfy every desire of our heart and he does so to the extent that we draw close to him. Whenever we draw close to God and seek to love as he first loved us – by giving of ourselves without reservation, “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace” – we can be certain that we are on the way to heaven, to union with God who is our peace (Ephesians 4:3-4; 2:14). If you desire a life of happiness and of joy, stay on this way, and you will live life to the full.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Jacques Marquette, S.J., *Letter to Father Dablon*, 1672.