

Homily for the Mass Celebrating the Service of Catholic School Principals
Wednesday, March 25, 2026 | Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord

Christ the King Church
Springfield, Illinois

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brother priests, Norbertine Fathers, Catholic School Principals, Curia staff, honored guests, brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is good to be with you to celebrate this Mass together as we rejoice in and reflect upon the service of our Catholic School leaders across the whole Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. As we gather to reflect on how God is calling us to serve the students and families in our Catholic Schools, it is good to recall that we look constantly for signs of where God is at work in the world and in the ministries that He has entrusted to our care. In the verses from Isaiah that we heard in our first reading, we are prompted to ask ourselves anew, “Where in our world and in our lives can we see the signs of God’s work among us?” The stubbornness of Ahaz, who refuses to ask for a sign from God even when invited to do so, is a cautionary tale for all of us. The issue is not merely looking for a sign from God, but refusing to follow where those signs lead us. After all, looking for a sign can be proof that we want to follow where God wants to lead us. Looking for a sign can be a

confession that we are prone to go astray without clear signposts of what He wants us to do and where He wants us to be.

The proclamation from Isaiah is a kind of sign, an asterisk in the text of the Old Covenant that points out how we can know with surety that the New Covenant is at hand: “the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel.” Here the Lord speaks through Isaiah to a people too stubborn and hostile to comply with God’s will. The greater sign is the revelation that God’s will is not thwarted by human resistance and belligerence. God will work through a stubborn people, accomplishing, Himself, the work of our redemption—not only through us, but even despite us, at a certain level. He saves us from our own stubbornness, as He becomes one of us in the Incarnation.

Isaiah thereby reveals a sign of graces yet to come in a Trinitarian revelation, as a sign from the Father is revealed through a prophecy of the Holy Spirit of the coming of the Son of God into human history. Isaiah announces that in the coming presence of the Lord, He will come to dwell among us and be both a sign and a reality of His desire to encounter and to covenant with man.

Whereas other religious traditions offer different pathways for man's search for God, the Catholic Church offers the world the totally unique truth claim that the history of creation is the chronicle of God's unceasing quest to encounter man. Following our creation and fall – despite our rejection of Him, God never stops trying to reconcile, restore, and rescue man. Normally, God seeks to rescue us from ourselves, because we have a tendency to think we know better than our Creator what will make us happy and fulfilled. What is truly immutable or unchanging in God is His unceasing search to find, speak to, be with, and watch over us, even when we are actively pushing Him away from us.

Let us then ponder with awe and wonder, the prophecy to Ahaz. It reveals to us a God who is actively searching for you and for me. This is a God who refuses to let our rejection of Him be the final word in His covenant of love with us. In the great narrative of God coming to save us from self-inflicted grief, wounds, and death, there are signs of grace until Grace Himself comes in the flesh to be one of us, and to redeem us through a life of human cares, pain, and agony. That great self-offering of God is both the sign of our salvation, and our actual redemption itself. Ours is a God who is not content to leave us with mere signs of His work among us, but who

comes to live, suffer, and die as one of us. Our God comes as a sign to us of His immutable will that Man should have an everlasting offer to dwell with God and have eternal life for those who will say “yes” in fidelity to His will.

Our second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews underscores the finality of Christ’s passion and death as the eternal and indisputable sign of God’s inexhaustible efforts to find us and to love us more deeply and authentically than we love ourselves.

The Trinitarian love that rescues us is mirrored in the life of the Holy Family. For it was in the home of the Holy Family in Nazareth where Christ was formed in his human nature to know the Word of God, to be obedient to the will of His Heavenly Father, and to understand the pains and frailties of human nature. All of this happened in the midst of relationships characterized by faith, hope, and love with Mary and Joseph. Jesus had a family that modelled trusting hope in the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and courageous charity in the example of Saint Joseph. Christ, as the Son of God, was obedient to his earthly parents, we are told, even after they discovered him teaching in the Temple at Jerusalem. It was in the context of the lived example of Mary’s faith and Joseph’s love that Jesus learned the Old Testament scriptures, all the prophecies, chronicles, and psalms of the

people of Israel. A family dedicated to prayer, worship, and love of God formed Our Lord in his earthly life and youth.

Christ's own earthly formation was in the midst of his grace-filled parents, His nearest human models who were not only obedient to signs, but who also chose to be signs themselves. Mary is the very embodiment of receptive and fruitful faith in God. Joseph is a living sign of courage and protection. In our own lives, we must therefore look for signs and be willing to conform ourselves to what those signs point to for our choices in service to God.

If we want to call others to enter into a deep covenant of love with God, we must be the sign of grace that such a life is truly transformative. It is only then that others will seek the resilience, joy, and healing that they see in us. We can ask for a sign, look for a sign, proclaim a sign, or **become** a sign to bring others closer to the God of Love. The context of a family of love reflects not only Jesus' human life, but also his divinity, as the Second Person of the Trinity, in a relationship of self-giving love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For we worship a God who is Himself a family of loving relationship. To the extent that our own relationships resemble the solicitous

love of the Holy Family and the Blessed Trinity, we will become all that God has created us to be.

Mary is the human embodiment of pure human receptivity to what God can make of us and wishes to make of us, and bring into being through us, if we proclaim with her, "be it done unto me according to thy Word." Joseph is the living model of courageous love that risks much for the preservation of all. Our call as Catholic Educators is to place ourselves in the midst of this Trinitarian illumination in the Holy Family and the potential for transformation of our own lives. Let us throw wide the often-guarded portals of our hearts and say to God, "I am wholly at your disposal, Lord." Only in this way can we conceive Christ in our own hearts so that He can truly be King of our Souls.

The call on us today is the same as it was for Ahaz and the same as it was for Mary. Are we willing to let God work signs and wonders in the world, in and through us? We have the charge to bring Christ the King into the midst of the lives of the students and families we serve. This can only come to pass if we receive the Annunciation sent from the Father, in the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit for the birth of the Son in our souls.

We proclaim the healing power of Jesus Christ to our Catholic School families. We know that they will flourish only if they will make Him the center of their family life. The world's answers for brokenness and sin cannot lead to happiness, because wholeness is not found in money, possessions, recreational chemicals, or on an obsession with self, the unceasing cascade of fixating on MY desires, MY thoughts, or MY wants.

It is from Mary and Joseph that we, like Jesus, learn our first earthly lessons in discipleship. A family that models for each other faith and love is the key to inspiring the great hope that characterizes the disciples of Jesus Christ. Rather than asking for a sign, Mary and Joseph decided to BE signs of the transformative power of God. They embodied those graces that God offered to them in entrusting Jesus to their care. Mary and Joseph are living signs of God's grace, of the coming of our Saviour. May we be faithful to their example so as to inspire the families we form.

May God give us this grace. Amen