

Board of Management

The Challenge to Proclaim God's Mercy

Introduction

As boards of management in Catholic schools, it is truly a challenge to proclaim God's mercy when there are already so many other serious items of business to attend to, as well as issues that affect the immediate and tangible lives of the students, parents, guardians and staff whom we nourish and care for in our roles. However, the sole reason for the existence of our school is because it was founded with a Catholic ethos to provide education to our young society, simply because we have a Christian duty towards and love for them. Sometimes we get tied in knots attempting always to do what is best for the school community.

In *Misericordiae Vultus*, Pope Francis has proclaimed a Jubilee Year of Mercy for the entire Catholic community to celebrate. The issue of mercy is dear to his heart as he, too, attempts to untie knots within the Church and to bring her to a place of joy and peace. For this, we all need to proclaim mercy.

While studying in Germany, Pope Francis came across a painting by Johann Georg Schmidtner called *Our Lady, Untier of Knots*. He has a deep devotion to this image. While its original depiction was an interpretation of married life, this painting has many layers of meaning. Indeed, no life is straightforward, whether we refer to married life, single life, consecrated life or indeed our professional lives. In untying the knots we encounter, we answer the call to mercy by responding with love to need where we experience it and see it.

Let us devote ourselves to this image of Our Lady during Catholic Schools Week and remember also that she is Our Mother of Mercy.

WATCH

www.godtube.com/watch/?v=gCCBJNU

REFLECT

Reflections

- What 'knots' can you identify within your role as a member of the board of management that you would like to offer to Our Lady, Untier of Knots?
- What elements of this painting can you identify with and why?
- What figure within the painting can you identify with and why?
- Can you think of an occasion when you have become a knot in the ribbon of your role as a member of the board of management?
- Reflect on this painting and identify three ways its depiction can nurture the proclamation of mercy within your school.



Prayer

Holy Mary, full of the presence of God during your life, you accepted with great humility the Holy will of the Father and the legacy of your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Evil never dared to entangle you with its confusion. Since then you have interceded for all of our difficulties. With all simplicity and patience you have given us an example of how to untangle the knots of our complicated lives. By being our Mother forever, you arrange and make clear the path that unites us to Our Lord. Holy Mary, Mother of God and ours, with your maternal heart, untie the knots that upset our lives. We ask you to receive in your hands (*mention prayer request*) and deliver us from the chains and confusions that have us restrained. Blessed Virgin Mary, through your grace, your intercession and by your example, deliver us from evil and untie the knots that keep us from uniting with God, so that once free from every confusion and error, we may find him in all things and have him in our hearts and serve him always in our brothers and sisters. Mother of Good Counsel, pray for us.



Novena to Our Lady Untier of Knots
<http://www.theholynosary.org>

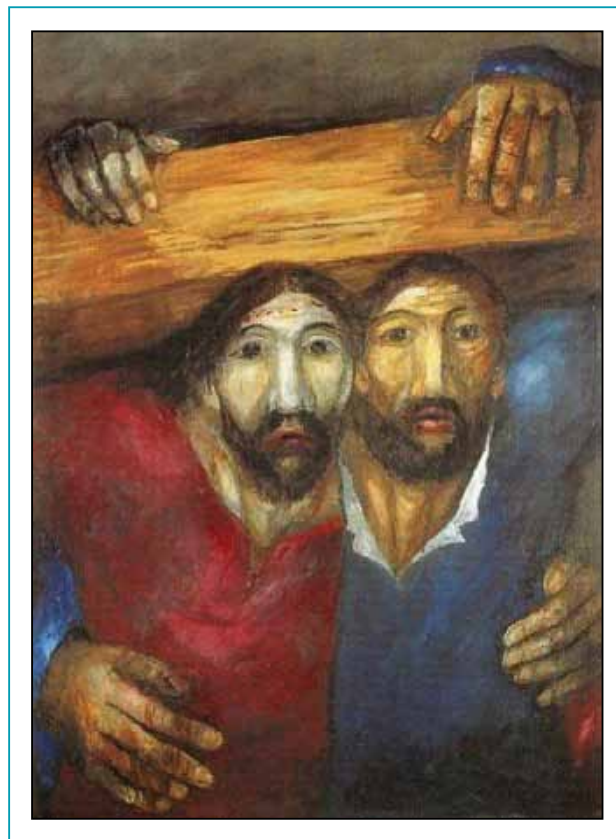


Staff to Staff

Introduction

Our school is a busy hive of activity. Apart from teaching our students, we as teachers have extra responsibilities. It seems that these responsibilities increase every term. Our lives and those of our students become increasingly complicated. As teachers, we rarely feel appreciated and our work behind the scenes of the classroom goes largely unknown and unrecognised. It seems impossible to consider helping to lighten the load of another member of staff when our own workload is already so overwhelming at times. During this week, when we focus on the Catholic ethos of our school, we try to make a special effort to proclaim God's mercy to our colleagues.

Simon of Cyrene had a busy day. He needed to go about his business and he had no knowledge or care for Jesus of Nazareth, the criminal whose execution he happened to encounter. Although forced to help Jesus carry his cross, it was Simon who was positively changed by the experience, and not the One he helped. We are created for others, and when we show compassion and mercy for others we do not give away something that is ours, rather we nurture it to grow more within our hearts.



Watch the Lamb

www.safeshare.tv/v/ss56531d6879e15

(This video contains images some people might find disturbing.)

REFLECT**Reflection****Matthew 27:32**

As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Luke 23:26

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus.

- Imagine that you are Simon of Cyrene. Write a diary entry for the day you met Jesus. Describe the sights and the sounds. Describe your emotions before, during and after the event. How has meeting Jesus changed you?
- Decide three ways that you can help to carry the cross of one/some of your colleagues this week. Your colleague does not have to be aware that you are helping them. Gestures may include:
 - * Prayer
 - * Forgiveness for a past misunderstanding
 - * Doing a small task to lighten the burden of their workload
 - * Befriending a member of staff you do not know very well
 - * Praising colleagues for their efforts and hard work

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to gladly bear one another's burdens through the example of Simon of Cyrene. You opened his heart and changed it through his merciful act of carrying the cross of your Son. Help us to see our colleagues in need, even when it is inconvenient for us to help them. Help us to experience the joy in our little sufferings so that, in sharing the compassion and mercy we feel in our hearts for others, it may grow even more abundantly, remembering what you said to your disciples, 'whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, you do to me (Matthew 25:45)'. Amen.

Staff to Student

In Memory of Victoria Soto

**Introduction**

Who can forget the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012? Who can forget the mercy and love of that one teacher who became the face of Jesus in giving her life for others? Victoria Soto hid her students and acted as a human shield. She did this indiscriminately for them. She loved them equally. It's possible she had difficulty with some students in her classes, but her final act showed her sense of responsibility towards every one of them and her deep mercy for others. It was an extraordinary act in an extraordinary situation. It was a reminder that despite the evil in the world, the light of mercy will always shine brighter. Victoria's final act is not one that ought to be asked of any teacher, but her attitude is one that should be emulated by all teachers.



Some children are wayward and wild as they learn and grow into adulthood. Some are frightened and shy and introverted. All are beautiful and bring deep joy. The Parable of the Prodigal Son depicts a father who accepts his son with all his shortcomings and hopes for restoration of his life. This parable is largely used as a comment on the forgiving father. So, let us get unfamiliar with the parable and look instead at Rembrandt's interpretation.

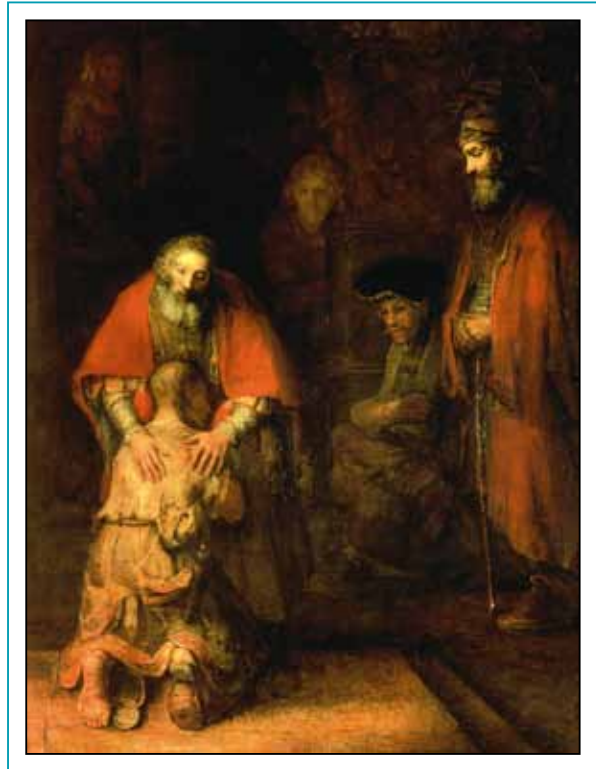
REFLECT

Reflection

Look at the six characters in this painting. Think of times when you were each of the six characters.

- What does the posture of the father say to you?
- What are your thoughts about the left foot (and shoe) of the prodigal son?
- Consider a time you went more than halfway to meet a student and encouraged them in their work and ability.
- Whose responsibility is the bringing about of mercy in this painting? Whose is it in the classroom?
- In the parable, the father runs to meet the son while he is still 'a long way off'. To what situation can you apply this in the classroom?

Talk to your students about their expectations of you as their teacher, and your expectations of them as students. Ask them what you all can do during Catholic Schools Week to proclaim God's mercy to the wider community as a class bound and united in your own particular Catholic ethos.



For an insightful comment on Rembrandt's painting, read Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Double Day, 1994).

Prayer

Mother of Mercy, whose Son's image was left on St Veronica's shroud in gratitude for her act of mercy, thank you for the gift of Victoria Soto to the world. She was your image in an instance of horrific evil. Thank you for her courage. Through her inspiration and prayers, instil in me a deep love for my students and a desire to see them grow more and more into your image and likeness. When troubles pass between us, restrain my judgement of them and inspire me to go to meet them while they are still a long way off. Help us, as a class, to work together to proclaim your mercy always, most especially in those times when it is most difficult. Amen.