

Being a Head Teacher: The Why of Catholic Education.

We were called on to inspire the world by our witness and the attractiveness of our faith giving meaning and purpose to our life and work.

Our vocation is to be God's ambassadors to the world, giving testimony through the way we live that it is possible to survive and thrive under the most adverse conditions (e.g. constant criticisms of catholic schools and their right to exist, falsehood of sectarianism, etc), to construct a community for which we all bear collective responsibility, and to **“act justly, love with mercy and walk humbly”** with our God.

We are not just another minority. We are people who predicate freedom on teaching our children to love, not hate. Ours is the faith that consecrated marriage and the family, and spoke of responsibilities long before it spoke of rights. Ours is the vision that sees alleviation of poverty as a religious task because you cannot think exalted spiritual thoughts if you are starving or sick or homeless and alone. We do these things because we believe that is what God wants of us.

Jesus, through his ministry taught the why. That is how the greatest of leaders inspired action from his day to ours. If you want to change the world, start with why. Start with you.

“In a social order in which everyone has equal dignity in the eyes of heaven, a leader does not stand *above* the people. He serves the people, and he serves God.”

**To lead is to serve.
Those who serve do not
lift themselves high
They lift other people high**

C. S. Lewis rightly defined humility not as *thinking less of yourself* but as *thinking of yourself less*. The great leaders respect others. They honour them, lift them, inspire them to reach heights they might never have done otherwise. They are motivated by ideals, not by personal ambition. They do not succumb to the arrogance of power.

The mistake is to see leadership in terms of status. A leader is one higher than the rest: the alpha male, the top dog, the controller, director, dominator, the one before whom people prostrate themselves, the ruler, the commander, the superior, the one to whom others defer. That is what leaders are in hierarchical societies. “setting themselves above” the people.

Leadership is not a matter of status but of function. A leader is not one who holds himself higher than those s/he leads. That, in Christianity, is a moral failing not a mark of stature. The absence of hierarchy does not mean the absence of leadership. An orchestra still needs a conductor. A play still needs a director. A team still needs a captain.

A leader need not be a better instrumentalist, actor or player than those he leads. His role is different. S/he must co-ordinate, give structure and shape to the enterprise, make sure that everyone is following the same script, travelling in the same direction, acting as an ensemble rather than a group of prima donnas. S/he has to have a vision and communicate it. At times s/he has to impose discipline. Without leadership even the most glittering array of talents produces, not music but noise. Everyone does what was right in their own eyes” That is what happens when there is no leadership.

Where you find humility, there you find greatness.

We're all leaders, and we're leading all the time, well or poorly.

*Leadership springs from **within**. It's about **who** I am as much as what I do.*

*Leadership is not an act. It is my **life**, a way of living.*

I never complete the task of becoming a leader. It's an ongoing process.

Martin Luther King

**“Everybody can be great -
because anybody can serve.”**

“All power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Lord Acton

History has been about what Hobbes described: “a general inclination of all mankind: a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death.”

Power is dangerous. It corrupts. It also diminishes. If I have power over you, then I stand as a limit to your freedom. I can force you to do what you don't want to do. Or as the Athenians said to the Melians: The strong do what they want, and the weak suffer what they must.

Sometimes the worst mistakes we make are when we project our feelings onto others: ambitious and driven by ambition.

Leaders can fail for two kinds of reason. The first is external. The time may not be right. The conditions may be unfavourable. There may be no one on the other side to talk to. When British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was asked what was the most difficult thing he had to deal with in government, he replied, “Events, dear boy, events.” Machiavelli called this *Fortuna*: the power of bad luck that can defeat even the greatest. Sometimes despite your best efforts, you fail. Such is life.

The second kind of failure is internal. A leader can simply lack the courage to lead. Sometimes leaders have to oppose the crowd. They have to say No when everyone else is crying Yes. That can be terrifying. Crowds have a will and momentum of their own. To say No may be to put your career, even your life, at risk. That is when courage is needed, and not showing it can constitute a moral failure of the worst kind.

“Leaders can fail for two kinds of reasons. The first is external. The second kind of failure is internal.”

“It is easy to be critical of people who fail the leadership test when it involves opposing the crowd, defying the consensus, blocking the path the majority are intent on taking.”

There are times when you need someone with the courage to stand against the crowd, others when you need a peacemaker.

No one person can do everything.

**leadership is service,
not dominion or
power or status or
superiority.”**

To be a leader means spending time to study both the Gospels in relation to the culture we operate in: to understand the educational world as it is, and through the Gospel, to understand education as it ought to be.

Leaders of schools should never stop learning. That is how they grow and teach others to grow with them.

It is often held that **the leader is the servant of those s/he leads.** In our faith **a leader is the servant of God, not of the people**; but neither is s/he their master. Only God is that. Nor is s/he above them: s/he and they are equal. S/He is simply their teacher, guide, advocate and defender. **His/Her task is to remind them endlessly of their vocation and inspire them to be true to it.**

Jim Collins in his book *From Good to Great* tells us on the basis of extensive research that the great organisations are those with what he calls 'Level 5 leaders,' people who are personally modest but fiercely ambitious for the team. They seek, not their own success, but the success of those they lead. This is counterintuitive. Hence the life-changing mantra:

To lead is to serve. The greater your success, the harder you have to work to remember that you are there to serve others; they are not there to serve you.