

Gala Speech #1

Most of you have heard the phrase, “Give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for his life.” In fact, you have probably heard this cliché quote all too often, so often that it has begun to lose its meaning. I know I have! But I am here to tell you that my time here at Lourdes has taught me the profound truth of this statement. It is indeed a great analogy for what a truly classical education aims to achieve.

In most schools, including some of the previous schools I attended, too often education is reduced to merely obtaining a set of facts, or knowledge, or skills. And why learn those? Well...so that we can obtain some other set of facts, or knowledge, or skills...of course, at that point we have likely forgotten the first set of facts, and knowledge, and skills...and probably the second set...or third...wait? Where was I again? Which grade am I in?

Seriously, this is like coming back every single day to the river of truth only to watch our teachers catch one little fish for us, so we have just enough energy to come back the next day to watch them...catch one more little fish...and so on. There has to be more to a true education!

Classical education, on the other hand, has not just given us fish, rather it has taught us to fish. At Lourdes, we have been taught that the importance is not so much what we have learned (and don't get me wrong, that is still very important!) but that we have become intrinsic learners (learners for life). We have not been merely given one truth and been asked to reproduce it on tests or essays. We have done that, and that is a fine fish...for a day...but we have been taught to seek after truth – to pursue it where it leads, to be challenged by it, and to hopefully come to the right answers, and sometimes more importantly, the right questions. This is fishing. And sometimes, it's difficult. Some days we go without catching anything. Sometimes it's so difficult that it feels like we're going hungry. But that hunger brings us back; pushes us to try even harder and overcome obstacles. And on those good days along our journey, we catch more fish than we can count. And it is so meaningful, productive and joyful.

Actually, this fishing analogy reminds me of a story from the Gospel of John. After a long night of fishing and failing to catch a single fish, some of the apostles were giving up for the day and going back to shore. Jesus saw them and asked them if they had caught anything, but they didn't know it was Jesus. They replied to Him, “No.” He then told them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat, and they thought He was crazy. Despite their doubt, they followed His instructions and caught a great amount of fish. As students receiving a classical education, I can't help but think that I have come to understand a bit of what those disciples felt. A classical education is difficult. It is not just getting the right answer, or filling out endless worksheets, or solving countless problems, or checking another thing off the list and moving on to what's next. It is a long and difficult journey in coming to recognize our desperate need and want for the Truth. And that cannot be accomplished or caught easily. We have to rely upon our teachers – our actual teachers here at Lourdes, and those teachers who have gone before us, and our parents who were our first teachers. From the books we have read to the ideas we have encountered here at Lourdes, we have come to trust the great teachers and fishers of truth of

the Western Tradition and allowed them to speak into our lives. But most importantly, we have encountered TRUTH itself, the True Teacher, Jesus Christ. Not only literally in the Mass which we celebrate to begin each day, but also in our studies, our friendship, and our work. We have learned that all truth is God's Truth. As the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins says, "Christ plays in ten thousand places!" So that wherever we pursue Truth, Beauty and Goodness, we are pursuing Him. Or maybe more accurately, He is pursuing us.

For He is not only the true teacher, but he is also the true fisherman. And the final goal of our classical education is to feast with Him on all the fish we have caught. Or more correctly, that He has taught us to catch. To remind us always of this final goal, at Lourdes we write AMDG on all of our papers. AMDG stands for the Latin "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam." For the greater glory of God. Our classical education here at Our Lady of Lourdes has equipped us to truly offer all that we do for the Greater Glory of God.

Lourdes has not just given me fish, but Lourdes has taught me to fish and will feed me for life.