

The Catholic Teacher

"I've learned so much, so very much about myself in defeat. I've learned very little to nothing in victory." So says legendary heavyweight boxing champion Floyd Patterson in his 1962 autobiography *Victory Over Myself*, a book I've never read. I was exposed to it and several rather deep discussions about it while observing Dr. Liebowitz's freshman *Great Conversation* class over the last several years. New Montfort students explore Patterson's assertion in the context of a life of challenges with which most of them can identify, and in light of one of the great ideas of Western civilization – that "*the unexamined life is not worth living*," a dictum uttered by Socrates at his trial as recounted by Plato in his famous *Apology*. As if reading those two texts concurrently is not enough, the students' imagination and discussion are further fueled by Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, Pericles' brilliant *Funeral Oration*, Abraham Lincoln's sublime *Gettysburg Address*, and Jack Schaefer's 1949 western classic, *Shane*.

This is a Montfort classroom; the convergence of ideas across the spectrum of human history and thought, vibrantly exposed to lively minds through analysis and thoughtful discussion, led by accomplished, creative, and caring teachers. In fact, it is the skill and commitment of her teachers combined with an unparalleled classical curriculum that makes the Montfort classroom a truly unique and genuinely outstanding place of learning and formation.

Mathematics is the language with which God wrote the universe, Mr. Edelson frequently reminds his students in Algebra and Algebra II/Trigonometry, quoting Galileo. Hidden in the algebraic and logarithmic expressions with which his students daily wrestle is the ordered code of a magnificent design. So too does Mr. Pridgen remind his sophomore students that the complexity of the periodic table is as clear and logical as the properly constructed syllogisms they learn from Mr. Vicinanza in his formal logic class. To this way of thinking, Mr. Miller's physics students know that *the force acting on an object is equal to the mass of the object multiplied by its acceleration* is more than just Isaac Newton's second law of motion; and Mr. Terilli's students know that the elliptical orbit of the planets is more than just the first of Kepler's three laws of planetary motion. Separately, and more importantly, viewed as parts of the glorious whole, they are no less than the Divine revelations of the Almighty's Creation. Any graduate physics student can teach the former; Montfort teachers boldly reveal and revel in the latter.

Ms. Dowd teaches that language is more than just words and meanings and a set of rules to govern them, but that it is the singular activity of the human species that makes it distinctly unique from every other living thing. This was never clearer than last Spring when she inspired her senior Latin students to invent a brand new language. Ms. Faur would add in her theology class that the truth and beauty of that perspective lies in the Incarnation – *the Word made flesh*. While Mr. Zemaitis enhances the students' understanding of the structure of language in Latin class, Mr. O'Sullivan seizes the Montfort student's study of language and mathematics in his music history class to unveil the genius of countless musicians, singers and composers who were experts at both. There are no subject restrictive stovepipes at Montfort. Each teacher is knowledgeable and appreciative of their particular discipline's place in the great oneness of creation and the Great Oneness of truth. Montfort students are bathed in it every day.

I suppose it is natural that from time-to-time we might take our teachers for granted. We mustn't. We must never fail to acknowledge the deep impact they have on our students through their skilled Socratic exploration of life's most important issues and questions: Dr. Connelly on Aquinas's theses about true happiness and friendship in senior philosophy class; Mr. Mari on the contemporary relevance of Roman and Greek culture through their study of classical languages; Mrs. Frank on the magnificence of human accomplishment and elevation of the human soul as expressed in art and architecture through the centuries; Mr. DiFiore on Augustine's struggles of the heart while going through painful, exhaustive, and exhilarating conversion; Mr. Flanagan on the intrinsic beauty and the practical application of mapping change through the study of calculus; and Mrs. Perrone on the entirety of medieval thought and expression through her keen and unparalleled knowledge and understanding of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

As their headmaster, I know they are ever-mindful of their own perceived shortcomings: *I wasn't clear enough, organized enough, prepared enough, patient enough*. There is no *hubris* in the Montfort teacher, only a deep humility in the enormity of their discipline and in the precious nature of their charges. I would remind them of what our students know C.S. Lewis said in his tome, *Mere Christianity*; "*True humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less.*" By this definition, you and the rest of our administration and staff are truly humble servants of our students. I join our Founder, President, and Chairman of the Board, Richard Greco, in saluting you all.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

Lt Col David Petrillo, Headmaster