



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Editor: Kiply Lukan Yaworski, Communications
Phone: 306-242-1500; Toll Free: 1-877-661-5005
communications@saskatoonrcdiocese.com

At 2009-2010 school year opening, Fr. Ron Rolheiser encourages GSCS staff to unleash the good news



BY KIPLY LUKAN YAWORSKI

In a keynote address to mark the opening of the new school year Aug. 28, internationally-known author and lecturer Rev. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, encouraged the staff and leadership of Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools to set about “unleashing the good news.”

The gospel is news that is so good it can seem “too good to be true,” Rolheiser said, describing the response he receives whenever he writes about St. Augustine’s theology describing how our love for someone connects them to the Body of Christ, whether that person believes or not. “By the very fact that you are loving that person, you are connecting them to the Body of Christ and you are salvation for that person, even if they don’t go to Church and so on: as long as they are connected to you, they are connected to the Body of Christ.” Hearing that, people either reject the teaching completely, or sadly say they wish it could really be true, he related.

But first and foremost, the gospels are good news, and are not primarily about good advice or good morals, he stressed, before exploring the meaning of the good news about God revealed by Jesus Christ.

This “is a God who is always a gentle invitation. God is never coercion, a threat, a fear, a neurosis, a guilt.” Rolheiser noted that in scripture there are 365 appearances or messages from God that begin with the words “do not be afraid.”

The fact that the Son of God comes into the world as a baby, completely helpless, reinforces this message: God is not a threat. Rather, he is an invitation, just as a baby is an invitation, Rolheiser said. “God is an invitation to enter life,” he stressed.

God does not judge, he added. Rather “the Word of God comes into the world and we judge ourselves,” by choosing death rather than life, he said. “But God doesn’t deal death.”

CONTINUED



The good news also reveals a God who loves us unconditionally – something that we have trouble believing, simply because in our human experience we never experience true, unconditional love, Rolheiser said. “Mom loved me better when I was good than when I was bad ... We simply haven’t got it inside ourselves to love unconditionally.”

In the death of Jesus and his descent into hell, the extent of God’s boundless love is revealed, Rolheiser added. “There is no hell that we can get into that God’s love can’t get into,” he stressed, reflecting on how in John 20, the risen Christ comes through the locked door to breathe his spirit upon the apostles paralyzed by fear and despair. Unlike the famous painting of Christ knocking on the locked door, the gospel reveals that even if we are incapable of opening the locked door, Christ can break through, Rolheiser said, relating the image to those who in darkness, depression and despair commit suicide.

“Sometimes in all of our lives, and not just for those who commit suicide, but with lack of reconciliation, with coldness, with woundedness, with abuse and so on, we are inside of ourselves, where we can no longer open the door of reconciliation, of warmth, of joy, of happiness, sometimes of life itself. The good news is that God is there. It’s the greatest consoling doctrine that we have,” said Rolheiser. “God is there. God goes through locked doors. That’s what the unconditional love of God means.”

We think we must somehow earn God’s love, but the good news is that God loves us first, no matter what, Rolheiser stressed. “We believe in a God of redemption, a God who can make it right, a God who loves us unconditionally, even when we’re not good.” When we truly understand that good news of how much God loves us, we respond in love, he said.

If we are living out of fear ourselves and don’t feel the joy of God’s love, we are probably not going to do a good job of teaching about Jesus, he noted.

The unconditional love of God is central to the good news and is what must be “unleashed” to others, especially the mission field of our own children, our own families and our own secular communities, Rolheiser said.

“The world isn’t our enemy ... the world is our child. Your kids ... may be belligerent and in your face right now, but they’re not the enemy. We have to love them and reach out to them.”

CONTINUED

To witness to the good news of God's unconditional love as revealed by Jesus we need a new maturity, Rolheiser said, noting we must never denigrate freedom in the name of God, because freedom is a gift from God. The goal is to carry freedom responsibly, while admitting to ourselves that many times we are immature, and can't be trusted with our freedom: we need help. He stressed that young people are watching adults, and emphasized the impact of maturity and faithfulness.

It is also time to re-inflate the religious romantic imagination of young people, to move beyond theology and catechesis to nourish their hearts, and not just their intellects, he said. He cited examples, such as St. Francis of Assisi's passionate gestures which caught the romantic religious imagination and have inspired people for 700 years; the movie *Going My Way* in the 1950s, which prompted young men to seek out seminaries; and Thomas Merton's book *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which brought droves of inquirers to Trappist monasteries.

In order to unleash the good news it is necessary to be non-combative and non-defensive, while at the same time living out one's own faith and convictions, he concluded, stressing the importance of remaining faithful in our walk with those we are evangelizing. Although we may often fail in our efforts to be like Jesus, our faithfulness over the long haul will have an effect, he said.

Originally from Cactus Lake, near Macklin, SK, Rolheiser serves as president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. A lecturer and author of books on spirituality, his weekly column is carried by more than sixty newspapers worldwide. The opening celebration of the new school year for the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools division also included the launch of a new mission statement (see related article.)