

The Moral Imagination: The Heart and Soul's Best Guide
Achieving the Goals of a Catholic Education
Through the Good, True, and Beautiful in Literature

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“The eye sees what it has been given to see by concrete circumstance, but the imagination reproduces what, by some related gift, it is able to make live.”
-Flannery O’Connor

Introduction:

In August of 1993, John Paul II released an encyclical to his brother bishops entitled *Veritatis Splendor – The Splendor of Truth*. In this beautiful document John Paul reminded his readers that there is truth, it is knowable, and the human heart craves that truth. The encyclical is divided into three parts; the first part is of particular interest because the question raised is what so many parents and teachers are asking today about Catholic education.

John Paul II begins with the story of the young man who comes to Jesus asking, “Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus asks the young man why he asks about the good, as there is only one who is good. He then tells him to keep the Commandments, which the young man says that he does. “What do I still lack?” he asks of Jesus. (Matthew 19:16-21).

John Paul II steps back from the Gospel and points out that the young man is not asking for other rules he must follow, but an inner conversion he feels called to obey. When he asks about the good, he is seeking God, who is the source of all goodness. Jesus tells him how to fill his longing for the Good – He, the Truth, evangelizes him with the truth.

We parents, teachers, administrators, and clergy are asking the same question as the young man. We ask not only for ourselves, but for our children and those in our care. “Teacher, what good must I do, and what must be done for them, to help them achieve eternal life?” If we are not pursuing the answer to this question, the point of the Catholic education is meaningless.

Pope Benedict the XVI, in an address to the Bishops of England, Scotland, and Wales said there is an “urgent need to proclaim the Gospel afresh in a highly secularized environment.” This is the new evangelization called for by our Holy Fathers, yet it is an evangelization that demands a personal transformation from each and every one of us. It is not, as the young man who questions Jesus learns, a simple checklist we mark off to grow in our spiritual life.

The new evangelization, according to Catholic writer Stratford Caldecott, begins with a call to discipleship. The desire to be connected to Christ, to Him who is the Good, leads the soul on a “way of beauty.” For children, especially Catholic children, this journey begins in the home as the child sees the relationship of the parent/parents with Christ. For those children, their parents as first educators is truly a blessing. The recitation of prayers, Bible stories read, saints lives examined – these all hone the moral imagination of the child.

However, there are also those who do not have the benefit of this example, and therefore there must be an awakening in the child of the moral imagination which takes place outside the home. As Caldecott states so beautifully, this awakening, when it takes place inside of a community (the Catholic school), helps to create a place of “shared values and ideals, a moral environment where the individual person is valued, supported, and cherished.”

Suddenly, the character of Christian community permeates the entire school building, reaffirming the way each individual acts towards another, the respect and attention given to each person during the day. That which was once simply a written mission statement comes alive in the acts of prayer and liturgy, kindness and courtesy, humility, self-sacrifice, and self-discipline.

What is Morality?

What does it mean to be moral? If we go back to the Gospel of the young man and Jesus, we must note that the commandments Jesus asks the young man about all have to do with the relationship of one person to another. Jesus specifically mentions murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and honoring one's parents.

The commandments that guide our relationships with one another are not more important than those which pertain only to God. However, John Paul II is very clear about how these commandments must be lived when he writes, "Both the Old and the New Testaments explicitly affirm that *without love of neighbor*, made concrete in keeping the commandments, *genuine love for God is not possible*" (emphasis in the original).

John Paul II further writes, "The moral life presents itself as the response due to the many gratuitous initiatives taken by God out of love for man." We must grow in our gratitude to God by living a moral life that shows our love and respect for one another. How do we prepare the mind of a child to understand what this means? Again, John Paul II tells us that, "God has already given an answer to this question: he did so by creating man and ordering him with wisdom and love to his final end, through the law which is inscribed in his heart (cf Rom 2:15), the 'natural law.'" The work has been done for us by the Creator, the law of God has been written on the heart of each person. The drawing forth of what has been inscribed there is the challenge.

Create In Me a Clean Heart, O God

Dr. Vigen Guroian, Professor of Theology and Ethics at Loyola College in Baltimore writes in his book, *Tending the Heart of Virtue*:

"Mere instruction in morality is not sufficient to nurture the virtues. It might even backfire, especially when the presentation is heavily exhortative and the pupil's will is coerced. Instead, *a compelling vision of the goodness of goodness itself* needs to be presented in a way that is attractive and stirs the imagination. A good moral education addresses both the cognitive and affective dimensions of human nature. Stories are an irreplaceable medium for this kind of moral education – that is, the education of character." (pg. 20)

The moral imagination, Guroian says, is the "distinctively human power to conceive of men and women as moral beings, i.e., as persons, not things or animals whose value to us is their usefulness. It is the process by which the self makes metaphors out of images recorded by the senses and stored in memory, which then are employed to find and suppose moral correspondences in experience."

Why is this so important, the ability to create metaphors for oneself? It is because they are, unconsciously for the most part, what each person uses to make sense of the world. New York University Professor Neil Postman is adamant about metaphor being not simply an ornament in an English class, but an actual organ of perception:

“Through metaphors, we see the world as one thing or another. Is light a wave or a particle? Are molecules like billiard balls or force fields? Is history unfolding according to some instructions of nature or a divine plan? Are our genes like information codes? Is a literary work like an architect’s blueprint or a mystery to be solved?” (Postman, *The End of Education*, pg. 174)

Jesus taught us time and again with metaphors that stay in our minds and hearts. He is the Good Shepherd, we are his sheep. We are called to be salt and light for others. Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. The grain of wheat, the mustard seed, the pearl of great price...all of these are metaphors to help us understand those things we cannot easily comprehend.

Jesus even teaches the people that their hearts are like soil: rocky and hard, full of thorns and weeds, or fertile and ready to receive the Word of God. For those who were willing to hear, open minded and willing of heart, the metaphors and parables of Jesus makes sense. It is for this reason that the moral imagination is best formed in the young heart and mind. The soil has not, God willing, already been turned to a barren or rocky wasteland, nor is it choked with brambles. The beautiful, fertile heart and mind of a child is the perfect resting place for the seeds of the moral imagination.

What Then, Shall We Read?

Nearly forty years ago psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim published his study on the need for moral education for children, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. Bettelheim very pointedly stated that children needed a moral education; not one that uses “abstract ethical concepts” but rather one that teaches through “that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaningful...The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales.” (p. 5)

Fairy tales are filled with the people and images understood by children: the rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish, the lazy and the industrious, the good and the evil. The symbols are not vague and hidden but extremely overt: flowers, water, dirt, ashes. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge said, the best symbol “always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible.” Symbols are not chosen randomly but point to an abstract meaning naturally because of what they are physically. Water symbolizes cleansing because it cleanses. The rose symbolizes beauty because it is beautiful.

Fairy tales present “other worlds,” but they still employ “real” moral laws of character and virtue. The challenge to the reader or listener is to make sense out of these worlds, to imaginatively navigate him/herself as a resident of the tales, to take the risks, joys, failures and triumphs therein along with the characters and emerge transformed.

The virtues now come to life, with a greater significance and personal identification. The powerful images of good and evil found in stories such as “The Snow Queen” or “Cinderella” stimulate the imagination and help form the metaphors necessary to interpret the world. Relating these imaginative stories to those Bible stories that the child hears at home, at Mass and at school reinforces those virtues that one needs as a mature person.

Russell Kirk wrote in *Enemies of Permanent Things*, “The fantastic and the fey, far from being unhealthy for small children, are precisely what a small child needs; under such a stimulus a child’s moral imagination quickens. Out of these early tales of wonder comes a sense of awe – and the beginning of philosophy. All things begin and end in mystery.”

As Catholics, what more could we ask for our children and students than the child awakening to awe, to being born into wonder? The mystery which is the Mass, the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the mystery of the Incarnation – they become more easily accepted and held dear in the heart when that heart has been prepared to receive the most precious of all mysteries.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “The truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a voice of authority, an unshaken voice, that is the one eternal education: to be sure enough that something is true to dare to tell it to a child.” Likewise, Ethel Pochocki, in her introduction to *Once Upon a Time Saints* writes, “Fairy tales clear the way for sanctity. They are the child’s first morality play, clear-cut, no-nonsense black and white, good and evil, life and death – with a bit of fun thrown in to alleviate the pain.” How well said!

Fairy tales, because of their accessibility, are one of the greatest storehouses of wisdom and moral insight about the human experience. They are a tonic for the old soul, a source of delight for the young. They restore our love for life and strengthen our desire to be good. They lighten our hearts, engage our resolve, and sweeten our minds.

Happily, the moral imagination of the child is not dependent on fairy tales alone for sustenance, but on the best of literature appropriate for children. This does not mean, however, books written expressly FOR children, and certainly not the didactic tomes which often pass for children’s literature. Good literature should allow us to enjoy our lives more or to endure it better. Fortunately, there is a wealth of children’s classics which do both.

Dr. Mitchell Kalpakgian, Professor of English at Simpson College in Iowa, gave a beautiful summation of what good children's literature should do for readers:

“Children's classics which illuminate the mysteries of life both increase our capacity for joy and strengthen our patience and perseverance. They whet our appetite for life and instill a love of the noble, heroic, and the courageous. They make us rejoice in our childhood and the simple, innocent pleasure which form a lifetime of fond memories, and they remind us that, though we are older, our childhood remains within us and comes alive as we enjoy the company of the young or revel in our children and grandchildren...Our lives make a difference in the lives of others. That wishes are answered, that luck is real, that dreams are not too good to be true, that heroes conquer monsters, that little tailors defeat giants all testify to a world governed by Divine Providence, not by might, cunning, or chance. That the world is “so filled with a number of things” – fun, friendship, stories, homes, families, adventures – acknowledges that life's deepest sources of happiness are for everyone. That the simple outwit the cunning, that the weak defeat the strong, that the humble are exalted, that children in their innocence have a “power” which makes men and beasts serve them reassure us that, in Don Quixote's words, ‘where there is life, there is hope.’” (The Mysteries of Life in Children's Literature)

Classic children's literature is the solid base on which the moral imagination is constructed. Having read the classics early in life, students have a firm grasp of virtues and values as they read more adult literature in the high schools and in college. Reading upper level texts with a “Catholic eye” becomes second nature. For example, when the book *Little Women*, with the theme of a happy home life is read in grade school, the tragedy of a family torn apart in Elie Wiesel's *Night* is easier to understand and take to heart in high school.

In the best books for the young there is a recurrent theme of wishes and desires, the heart's longing to be fulfilled. Often the wishes and dreams come true, but only after much praying, hoping, working and waiting. The virtues of patience, loyalty, courage, charity, compassion, and perseverance are all instrumental in bringing about the desired outcome – and always dependent on the will of God Himself.

These are the very virtues we, as Catholics, nurture in our children. They are not to be confused with values, which may be as changing as the Kansas weather. Children's classics reinforce real virtues, reminding us that human happiness often comes in the form of self-abnegation, not self-gratification. The perennial truth of children's classics, the “good books,” is that it is in giving of

oneself completely, without expecting to receive something back, that we find redemption.

The Cardinal Virtues

The Catholic Church admonishes us to grow in the Cardinal Virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude. All other virtues fall under these, and each one is necessary for growth in the spiritual life. Each of the books chosen for the school grade levels is one that encourages that mysterious inner growth towards the good, the true, and the beautiful.

It is important to have the meanings of these four firmly in our minds so that we can see how the other virtues we are working on sit safely under them, each deepening the faith and growing the soul toward God:

Prudence: This is right reason applied to practice. It is not simply looking at all the possibilities and choices and then choosing one, it is making a choice toward action based on that which is known to be right and true. Prudence allows us to take counsel carefully with ourselves and others and then direct our activity toward the Good.

Justice: This entails the habitual inclination of the will. Justice calls us to a constant and permanent determination to give everyone his rightful due. In other words, it is the respect we owe to others because they are not us – we protect their rights as children of God to our fullest ability.

Fortitude: This virtue is the virtue of martyrs. It serves prudence and justice – which tell us what needs to be done – by giving us the courage and strength to act. Fortitude allows us to cope with sorrow and loss, steadies our will, and helps us overcome fear.

Temperance: The moderation of our own desires, especially the desire for legitimate goods, lest the inordinate desire for them should take over. Temperance reminds us we are more than animals, and that we are capable of acting for the Good even though our nature desires otherwise.

When we fully understand the Cardinal Virtues, other virtues quite naturally occur to us that are subordinate to these. They include respect, responsibility, diligence, gratitude, generosity, courage, loyalty, compassion, hope, self-control, charity, faithfulness, courtesy, perseverance, honesty, gentleness, love of country, and last, but certainly not least, a sense of wonder at the world which God has so generously provided for us.

The following pages are recommendations by grade level of stories and books which promote virtue. Though not overtly Catholic, they are treasure

troves of life's richest wisdom. In their simplicity they help us to appreciate the gift of life, the enjoyment of playfulness in learning, and the ability to clearly see things as they are. Chosen with the specific intention of forming the moral imagination, they will, as the poet Percy Shelley once wrote, "allow us to experience life from the perspectives of others, which is thus essential to love itself."

First Grade:

RESPONSIBILITY/DILIGENCE

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel (Burton)
Lentil (McCloskey)
Pinocchio (Collodi)

FAMILY/FRIENDS

Happy Little Family (Caudill)
Little Pear (Lattimore)
Thy Friend, Obadiah (Turkle)
Oxcart Man (Hall)

GOODNESS/GRATITUDE

Andy and the Lion (Daugherty)
The Pied Piper of Hamelin (Browning)
King Midas (Hawthorne)
Miraculous Pitcher (Hawthorne)

FORTITUDE

Cinderella (Grimm)
<http://audio.ancientfaith.com/specials/oi2012/Cinderella.pdf>
The Ugly Duckling (Andersen)
http://www.worldoftales.com/fairy_tales/Hans_Christian_Andersen/Andersen_fairy_tale_3.html
The Snow Queen (Andersen)
http://www.worldoftales.com/fairy_tales/Hans_Christian_Andersen/Andersen_fairy_tale_17.html

The Golden Press Children's Bible – Again, stories in this version are easily readable and are easy to parallel with other selections for this grade level.

Brief Synopses:

There is a wonderful edition currently in print of four stories by Virginia Lee Burton: ***The Little House, Katy and the Big Snow, Mable the Cable Car,*** and ***Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel.*** Mike Mulligan and his steam shovel MaryAnn must find a way to show people how useful she is and why she shouldn't be sold for junk. This is a great story about diligence, ingenuity and friendship.

Lentil by Robert McCloskey is all about overcoming what one can't do well, and finding the gift or talent one has been given. Young Lentil can't sing, but he loves music. Instead of giving up on his dream, he learns to play the harmonica...and saves the day when he foils Old Man

Sneep's plan to silence the town marching band. This is a great book for kids who may feel like they have to "keep up with" the other kids at every task. Be yourself!

In the Disney version of **Pinocchio**, the emphasis is on how the little puppet can grow up and become a "real boy." Pinocchio constantly finds himself in all kinds of mischief, but he attains the wish of becoming real when he demonstrates a true and unselfish heart by saving his father, Gepetto. Satisfying? Yes....sort of. Pinocchio gets his wish, but does he actually grow in his moral life?

In the book **Pinocchio**, Collodi has really created a masterpiece of children's literature. Pinocchio is the story of the Prodigal Son, a tale of a wandering rogue. He is created out of wood, and his being remains wooden until he connects the reality of the world, his deeds and his conscience. It is Pinocchio's response to the world, as it is for all of us, that determines what kind of person we will be. Will he make excuses, lay blame on others, lie and cheat to get what he believes he wants? Will he remain a puppet, a marionette with someone else pulling his strings all his life?

Collodi's Pinocchio commits wrongs that are not "merely the mistakes of ignorance, but the consequences of a hard head, undisciplined passions, and a misdirected will that resists good advice" (Guroian, pg. 42). He is not the innocent little wooden-headed creature who has the bad thrust upon him – he willingly participates in his own troubles, not caring about the effect his actions have on others, especially his father, Gepetto.

Throughout the book, Pinocchio is longing for his father, as we long for the Father. He continually makes bad decisions, neglects his filial duties, and turns from the good. Pinocchio must learn to turn away from his own destructive willfulness before he can achieve the status of a human boy. By the same token, we must turn from our life of willfulness and sin, in order to become children of the Father. Through our Baptism and the Eucharist we grown in our lives as true sons and daughters – we become less wooden and more fully human.

Pinocchio is a book that will seem easy and fun for children of this age to listen to, but there is plenty to think about and discuss. And interestingly, Pinocchio is on his own journey of developing a moral imagination. As the story progresses, he will outgrow his vain imaginings and his fantastical interpretations of the world; he will see things as they are – the true relationships he enjoys and the moral obligations and responsibilities he needs to embrace. This is definitely a book to take some time with – it is well worth the effort.

Happy Little Family by Rebecca Caudill is the story of the Fairchild family, living in the Kentucky hills over 100 years ago. The world is seen through the eyes of the youngest, Bonnie, who tags along after her brothers and sisters experiencing the daily pleasures and stresses of life. This book has a sense of freshness and wonder that naturally draws children into the joyful bonds of family life that we all desire.

There is a lightheartedness about the book **Little Pear**, by Eleanor Frances Lattimore, and it reminds us that we do need to be distracted occasionally from the seriousness of life. Little Pear and his friends live in China, around 1900. They are mischievous, and this lands them in trouble at times. Little Pear's older sister finds herself rescuing him more than once. This book and its sequel, **Little Pear and His Friends**, capture the mystery of childhood play, doing things simply for the sheer joy in them. Play, for all its apparent uselessness, is that which has a profound effect on each of us as we grow into adulthood.

Happy hearts and happy faces,
Happy play in grassy places –
That was how in ancient ages,
Children grew to kings and sages. R.L. Stevenson, “Good and Bad Children”

Thy Friend, Obadiah by Brinton Turkle is another of those simple, yet deeply meaningful books. Obadiah, a young Quaker boy, is followed everywhere by a seagull. He cannot stand the teasing he takes about it, but misses the seagull when it finally disappears. When it returns, injured, he learns to cherish the friendship he has with the bird as he nurses it to health. Not overtly religious, this book shows God’s love for us even in the creatures He puts into our lives.

Donald Hall’s beautiful book ***Oxcart Man***, illustrated by Barbara Cooney, shares the simple joy of a family working together to provide for their family’s needs. They work alongside each other through the year, preparing for the time that the father will take their goods to town to sell. He is able to sell everything, including the ox and cart, buy the goods they need, and return home, “with coins still in his pocket.” This is a lovely book for emphasizing how important each member of any family is in order to get the task of family living done.

Andy and the Lion by James Daugherty is a re-telling of the ancient story of Androcles and the Lion. Daugherty masterfully tells the story of how one good deed can certainly turn the tide of events in ways one can only imagine. The pictures are evocative of the joy both Andy and the Lion feel when they meet up for a second time. Small acts of kindness are not forgotten!

Robert Browning’s ***The Pied Piper of Hamelin*** is a wonderful poem that contrasts beautifully with *Andy and the Lion*. The people of Hamelin turn to the Piper to help rid their town of a rat infestation, promising to pay him for his help. He does as he is asked, but the heart-hearted mayor and townspeople do not keep their part of the agreement. The Piper warns them what will happen when they refuse to be grateful, but they ignore his warnings. How often do we ignore the admonition to have grateful hearts? This is a great story for a thoughtful discussion.

The story of King Midas can be found in many retellings. A very nice one is found in Hawthorne’s ***A Wonder Book*** entitled, “The Golden Touch.” The greed of Midas is his downfall, when he wishes everything he touches to turn to gold. He didn’t how very rich he really was – rich in the things that matter – until he lost those things most precious to him.

“The Miraculous Pitcher” is a lesser known story, but one that is perfect in the discussion about giving thanks and being generous. This story is also found in Hawthorne’s ***A Wonder Book***. Baucis and Philemon are two old people in a little town in ancient Greece. When two mysterious strangers enter the town (gods disguised as beggars), they are treated with scorn by the inhabitants. It is only Baucis and Philemon, having almost nothing themselves, who welcome them into their home. They offer a meager dinner of milk, bread and cheese, apologizing for having so little milk. Yet as their guests drink, the pitcher never runs dry! Their hospitality is rewarded by the gods with a perpetual pitcher of fresh milk. This is a great story to talk about in conjunction with the Gospel story of Jesus feeding the multitudes with loaves and fishes.

It is almost impossible to say enough about **Cinderella**. The Grimm brothers recorded this story, and we have to remember that they were very religious men. The story of Cinderella resonates with all kinds of beautiful Biblical allusions. Cinderella is taken from her rightful place as daughter of the house and thrown into the ashes of the kitchen. Like Jesus during the Passion, she is stripped of her beautiful clothes and dressed in rags, reviled and scorned by those who should love her. She is also like Job, patiently suffering the punishments that have befallen her, even in her innocence. She does not curse her father, but asks for a branch from a tree for a gift. This she waters with her tears – her sufferings. The branch is planted by her mother’s grave and she daily goes to pray there. It is the tree that grows from the branch that provides her with the beautiful clothing for the balls.

Cinderella grieves for the loss of her mother and lives in humiliation. Both of the Beatitudes, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” and “Blessed are they who mourn” apply to her situation. She is willing to suffer, but she also prays for help. For three days (a significant number!) she attends the balls at the palace. Each night she hides her true identity and goes back to the ash pile. However, she has, as the story says, her lamp burning beside her. Like the wise virgins in the Bible, she is ready for the time when the King’s son will come to find her – she awaits the coming of the bridegroom. When the prince asks if there are any other young women than the two stepsisters, Cinderella washes herself and presents her clean and happy face to the son. “Let us be glad and rejoice and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his wife has made herself read.” (Revelation 19:7)

Both **The Snow Queen** and **The Ugly Duckling** are masterful fairy tales by Hans Christian Andersen. There are links to the original stories included above. Both of these stories have been retold, abridged, dissected and misrepresented. They are really the best in the original, and those versions are online and easy to find. **The Ugly Duckling** is the story of a small bird who hatches from his egg and immediately is made to feel ugly because of his different appearance. His mother loves him very much, but knows he must find his way in the world. The duckling survives a number of unhappy situations and much abuse, but in the end he weeps tears of joy upon finding himself a beautiful swan. It is his diligence and courage that allows him to find his truly beautiful self, because he easily could have given up and hated what he thought he was. He is willing to courageously go out on his own and in doing so, he discovers not only his outer beauty, but his inner strength as well.

The Snow Queen is another fairy tale that is so mysterious. The courage and love of young Gerda for her friend Kay overcomes the wicked coldness and empty promises of the Snow Queen. Kay’s heart and eye have been pierced with pieces from a wicked mirror that a demon has made. Those who get a piece of this mirror in their eyes cannot see the world as it really is, but see it as an ugly and horrible distortion; worse yet, a piece of the mirror in the heart causes the victim’s heart to turn as cold as ice. Kay, who had once been the closest companion of Gerda, now takes delight in mocking her and all they had loved. He is taken away by the Snow Queen and slowly loses himself to her empty promises. Gerda, however, is willing to go to the ends of the earth to find him. When she does, the redemptive act of her love is enough to save him. This is a wonderful story, and one which really prepares children to understand better the wicked White Queen in the Narnia books.

Conclusion

Although there are quite a few books on the preceding pages, there are many others that should be on the shelves in all Catholic school libraries. While it may be true that young people want to read the newest “hot” books, it is questionable as to whether they should be promoted so readily in our Catholic schools. Some people feel that it doesn’t matter what a child reads, just as long as they are reading something, anything.

Of course it matters what we do with our minds, because they are to be used for making prudent decisions about our lives. Filling our heads with nothing but empty at best and questionable at worst stories when we are young doesn’t help us to form our moral consciences. Childhood is so brief – we should use this short window of time to fill hearts and minds with the “truest of true things.”

This paper began with the discussion of the moral imagination, which is a way of looking at life, making metaphors out of images. As we grow, these metaphors find a moral correspondence in experience. The most important word here is, again, “metaphor.” It has its root meaning in the Greek and is a “carrying over” or carrying beyond.” It lifts our mind up from one thing to another to another, linking them by suggesting a likeness. The more we shape the moral imaginations of Catholic students, the easier it should be for them to choose and employ the good, the true, and the beautiful in their lives as they link experience from childhood to the world they experience as young adults and beyond. Returning once more to Dr. Guroian and a quote from his book, *Tending the Heart of Virtue*:

“Children are vitally concerned with distinguishing good from evil and truth from falsehood. This need to make moral distinctions is a gift, a grace, that human beings are given at the start of their lives.” (pg. 3)

The innate moral sense that we are all born with, if not tended carefully, will fail to put down roots into our very beings. Nourishing the moral imagination is not something we might do, or we could do, it is something we must do. And, thankfully, it is a pleasant task for both the child and the adult. Let us end with another quote from Flannery O’Connor. Why are stories so important to children? And why are good stories the best?

“A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way...”

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