



**Day 3 | Saturday, March 9, 2024
Presenter: Malcolm Nelson**

My name is Malcolm Nelson and I am the principal of St. Therese Catholic Academy. I have been a teacher for 10 years and the principal for two. I attended St. Therese Catholic Academy as a child. Kindergarten through 8th grade. I was baptized there as a newborn and thus you could say I have been there my whole life. And to sweeten the story, honest truth, I knew what I wanted to be when I was 10 years old. I tell this story so much that the staff once had a bet last year, how many times would I say "I knew when I was 10 years old." Well to dive back into the story, I knew when I was 10 years old that I wanted to be a teacher at St. Therese, and I knew I wanted to be the principal at St. Therese.

In my pursuit of chasing my dreams, I went to O'Dea high school-Catholic, University of Portland for my Master's in Teaching Degree-Catholic. And then onto University of Notre Dame for my administrative degree. That school might as well be called Catholic U. The only public school institution I have been to was Washington State University for my undergrad degree. As an employee at St. Therese I taught P.E. for two years, 5th grade for one year, Middle school Math 8th grade homeroom for four years. And On the administrative team for now 3 years, two of those as the principal. I have been a part of the Office for Catholic Schools' GRACE Teacher Leader program, the Office for Catholic schools' Leadership Academy, and then the formally named Mary Ann Remick program out of Notre Dame. So why is all of this important?

Tell me if you have heard a similar story? "O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of Humanity, greedy, dishonest, adulterous- or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income".

Now I used these examples of my achievements to better tell the story of God's message being rooted in humility and love. I don't exactly walk around talking about myself to that extent, I promise, but you may think with all the practice I have had at being Catholic and all the preparation for my position as Principal, that I would be well prepared for the never ending grind of principal. This time of year is extremely hard on the administrative schedule because it is admissions season for returning and new families as well as Intent to returns for employees. This is the time of year where you are trying to continuously demonstrate that your community is worth investing in. Whether that be for a family, or in my journey to search for amazing educators at a time when housing does not favor, being an educator.

In the last 4 weeks, I have had three employees leave and take positions elsewhere. At a time when I am trying to assure families to rejoin STCA, three employees chose to exit. I can't help but think " ah man, now families are going to feel like its falling part." Additionally in my head, I am thinking, what am I doing wrong that all these employees are jumping ship. Then my mind begins to think, how many of my current employees are thinking "this place is falling apart." It is tough to not take it personally as the leader of the school. Of course I know that all three of the reasons the employees left are different and none have anything to do with me, but believe me it's hard to swallow. And to think I have all these...insert "accolades" listed up above.

So, I've been reflecting, and praying, and in the busyness of enrollment and staffing, the Novena of GRACE came exactly when I needed. Sneaky Jesus. Each of these readings spoke to me in a way that told me to allow grace and love for myself. As a school leader, I try to keep Grace and compassion and the front of everything I do because I understand the many complexities staff and families are going through. But often times I forget to give myself grace. Sometimes I forget that the lord will provide. I have been in a state of panic over the last month, thinking what am I going to do or say to reassure the community? Or reassure myself? The psalm reading today says "Lord, you will open my lips; and my mouth will proclaim your praise. For you do not desire a sacrifice.

I said dang, God. You're good.

The gospel reading reminds of the many stories where God tells us the power of humility and putting those before us. The first shall be last and the last shall be first. But what struck me even more is the passage that follows today's Gospel. For whoever does not accept the Kingdom of God like a child, will not enter. And something so simple as the connection of the two stories back to back reminded me that I am in the right place at the right time. I do not need to stress, or be a sacrifice. Instead, continue to Love. Love as the students do everyday. Give grace as the students do everyday. And let the lord do the rest.