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December 11, 2009

St. Damasus

" He who walking on the sea could calm the bitter waves, who gives life to the dying seeds of the earth; he who was able to loose the mortal chains of death, and after three days' darkness could bring again to the upper world the brother for his sister Martha: He, I believe, will make Damasus rise again from the dust."

Dear Students and Parents,

Praise be Jesus Christ! Today's saint is St. Damasus I. St. Damasus was Supreme Pontiff from 366 to 384. He was a very learned man, well versed in the Scriptures. He commissioned St. Jerome to complete the translation of the Bible into the Latin language. Shortly after his reign the 72 books of the Bible, hitherto scattered in different parts of the Orient, were collected into one volume. He defended the rights of the Holy See, and beautified the Roman resting places of the Christian dead and of the saints. Damasus was a vigorous defender of the orthodoxy, as well. He condemned the heresies of such men as Macedonius and Apollinaris and continued the march against Eastern Arians. He also confirmed the practice of singing the Psalms day and night in the churches and adding a Glory Be at the end of each Psalm.



This coming Sunday is "Gaudete Sunday." Gaudete means "rejoice" in Latin. It comes from the first word of the Entrance antiphon on Sunday. The spirit of joy that begins this week comes from the words of Paul, "The Lord is near." *"It will be said on that day, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."* (Isa. 25:9) This joyful spirit is marked by the third candle of our Advent wreath, which is rose colored, and the rose colored vestments often used at the Eucharist. We prepare this week by feeling the joy. We move through this week feeling a part of the waiting world that rejoices because our longing has prepared us to believe the reign of God is close at hand. And so we consciously ask: "Prepare our hearts and remove the sadness that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope which his presence will bestow." (taken from Creighton U site)

Thank you to those who made our holiday event, Tour of Homes, for Saint Thomas Aquinas Academy a success. Also, many thoughts of appreciation are sent to the Catholic Order of Foresters for promoting this year's Wreath Sales! **It's not too late to consider Scrip** as an excellent stocking stuffer! All these activities help to grow financial stability for our school.

Next week is our Christmas Program held at the elementary campus (see details in the newsletter). Pass the word to Grandpa & Gramma and/or any other relatives and friends who would like to witness the joy of children preparing for the coming of the "Baby Jesus".

Efforts to increase Standards-Based education in our school have been highlighted with our current Math Curriculum Review. Standards-based education is a process for planning, delivering, monitoring and improving academic programs in which clearly defined academic content standards provide the basis for content in instruction and assessment. Standards help ensure students learn what is important, rather than allowing textbooks to dictate classroom practice. Student learning is the focus - aiming for a high and deep level of student understanding that goes beyond traditional textbook-based or lesson-based instruction. A standards-based system:

- measures its success based on student learning (the achievement of standards) rather than compliance with rules and regulations.
- aligns policies, initiatives, curriculum, instruction, and assessments with clearly defined academic standards.
- consistently communicates and uses standards to focus on ways to ensure success for all students.
- uses assessment to inform instruction.

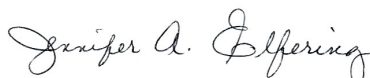
Standards-based systems increase student achievement and students generally learn better in a standards-based environment because everybody's working towards the same goal. Some of the benefits of moving our school in this direction include:

- Teachers know what the standards are and choose classroom activities and teaching strategies that enable students to achieve the standards.
- Students know the standards, too, and can see scoring guides that embody them. The students can use them to complete their work.
- Parents know them and can help students by seeing that their homework aligns with the standards.
- Administrators know what is necessary to attain the standards and provide professional development, resources and materials to ensure that students are able to reach the prescribed standards.

Curriculum development never happens overnight. In addition, integrating standards-based instruction with student-centered learning can be challenging. However, education is a continuing organic function of learning. Hence, it is necessary to continually seek ways to enhance opportunities for student achievement. Education is the act or the process of instructing or training. Learning is the ability to gain knowledge or a skill that is received by instruction or study. Our mission at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy seeks to inspire in students a life-long thirst for knowledge, wisdom and truth; a desire to reach the full potential which God intended for them; and a recognition of the discipline of mind and heart required for effective service to others in the love of God. Making learning relevant to the learners not only opens the door to increased student achievement but it sets the heart a blaze with desire for learning. It is our goal to build a community of learning founded on researched-best practices within a structure of accountability in order to create the best learning environment which enhances each child's ability to succeed.

As we move forward in this process, I will periodically update you. Questions are always welcomed via my e-mail address, elfering.staa@gmail.com. Mrs. Jodi Dau is leading the team of teachers, parents and community members through this process. She holds a Master's Degree in Education in Instructional Technology. I will be introducing the other members of the team in future letters. Please keep their efforts in prayer that they may be guided by the Holy Spirit and grounded in charity. May the Peace of Christ be with you and your family. St. Thomas Aquinas, pray for us!

I remain yours,
Joyful in the service of Christ,



Mrs. Jennifer A. Elfering
President of Systems