



Education Sunday 13th September 2026



Catholic Education Service
Since 1847

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Foreword

The Catholic Church was a pioneer in the provision of education in England and Wales more than 1,000 years ago, with state involvement beginning only in the 19th century. The Church has continued to provide education in partnership with the government of the day ever since.

Established by the Bishops in 1848, Education Sunday is one of the oldest Days of Special Prayer in the liturgical calendar of England and Wales.

Education remains the Church's biggest charitable activity, from establishing schools for poor immigrant children in the Victorian era through to welcoming pupils from Ukraine and Hong Kong today.

In many other countries around the world governments do not fully fund Catholic schools, and a Catholic education is only available from a fee-paying, independent school.

Catholic education isn't just about the network of more than 2,100 schools and colleges in England and Wales, however. There are also four Catholic universities: Birmingham Newman; Leeds Trinity; Liverpool Hope; and St Mary's, at Twickenham. Originally established as teacher training colleges, they continue to train teachers today, and in greater numbers than the average for a university in the Russell Group.

The success of Catholic education is, of course, dependent on many thousands of teachers, lecturers, academics, support staff, leaders, governors, directors, advisers and others who have found their vocation in Catholic education, and without whom this would be impossible.

Catholic education continues to serve local communities and is an achievement worth celebrating - happy Education Sunday.

Paul Barber
Director of the Catholic Education Service

Overview

This year's theme for Education Sunday is drawn from its Gospel reading of Matthew 18:21-35: *I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.*

Pope Francis spoke about this reading from the Gospel in 2023:

"Today, the Gospel talks to us about forgiveness (cf. Mt 18:21-35). Peter asks Jesus: 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' (v. 21).

"Seven, in the Bible, is a number that indicates completeness, and so Peter is very generous in the assumptions of his question. But Jesus goes further, and answers him: "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (v. 22). He tells him, that is, that when one forgives, one does not calculate...

"...Jesus' message is clear: God forgives incalculably, exceeding all measure...

"...Forgiveness is the antidote to the poisons of resentment, it is the way to defuse anger and heal so many maladies of the heart that contaminate society."

Catholic education in Church schools and universities endeavours to acknowledge Jesus' loving presence in the lives of young people as they work, learn, pray, grow in character and virtue, and discover their vocation.

Education Sunday is an opportunity to showcase the works and fruits of this, especially locally. From a priest speaking in his homily about a local school, to pupils wearing their uniforms at Mass, Education Sunday can be the reminder to all members of the Catholic community of the importance of education to the Catholic mission.

Celebrating schools in church this Education Sunday

Holy Mass on Education Sunday is a wonderful opportunity for churches and parishes to celebrate Catholic schools. Here are some ways in which this can be done:

- Encouraging pupils from Catholic schools to wear their school uniforms to Mass
- Going through the Sunday's readings, the psalms and the bidding prayers with pupils
- Devising their own bidding prayers
- Arranging for pupils to gather the second collection at Mass
- Placing students' art or crafts in the church, church hall or other prominent place
- Having a student-led bake-sale in the church hall after Mass
- Arranging for pupils to come into church with their school banner
- Having a teacher or pupil read out the second collection appeal
- Having pupils present the gifts of bread and wine at the preparation of the gifts
- Including the school choir

Some questions to reflect upon for the appeal:

- What has my experience of Catholic education been?
- What are my favourite parts of the school I am involved in?
- What are the core values that drive my school?
- Do you feel like Catholic education makes a difference? How?
- What are the connections between my school and the parish?
- What inspires me in my work?

This list is not exhaustive, and features of particular schools could be identified and celebrated. Additionally, schools may wish to invite staff and volunteers to Mass, including teachers, teaching assistants, playground or home-time volunteers.

Reflection

The following reflection is by Fleur Dorrell, Biblical Apostolate Manager for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Jesus, as a little child, would have first heard Psalm 103 sung by the Cantor in his local synagogue in Nazareth. It's a psalm of pure praise of God and of the depth of God's mercy. It goes back to a terrible time in his people's history. Defeated, they were taken into slavery in an alien land as slaves. Slowly they accepted it was their fault. They had not lived according to the covenant God had made with Abraham and Moses. They had not created a society in God's pattern which protected the widow, the stranger and the orphan – the powerless ones in their midst. The Psalm proclaims God's faithful loving kindness. God did not give up on them but brought them back home to start again. And their response in song is profound "Bless the Lord O my soul" literally means 'let all that I am bless God's holy and mysterious name.' This is the God who can forgive us even before we know we need forgiveness.

As he grew up Jesus would have heard the words of Ben Sirach (a Jewish teacher) that the divine mercy, that we pray and hope for ourselves, must become how we live towards others. Jesus learnt that resentment, ongoing anger, holding people's faults in our hearts and memories, these are all destructive of common life together.

Forgiveness, mercy and reconciliation become core themes of Jesus' teaching. But even his closest disciples found this difficult. Was there to be no limit to our forgiveness? They found this unrealistic! It certainly wasn't the teaching of many Rabbis who thought it appropriate to forgive someone, who sincerely repented, up to three times. Peter thinks he is being very generous when he suggests we might forgive someone who has offended us seven times. Seven of course in the bible is the number of completeness, perfection, and spiritual fulfilment. God created the Cosmos in seven days. How must Peter have felt then when Jesus said not seven times "but 70 times 7!" Its worth noting that his sort of exaggeration is used often in Hebrew stories. Jesus doesn't literally mean 490 times. He is saying the mercy of God can not be limited by human judgement. He illustrates this by telling a powerful story.

A king lets a senior minister off an enormous debt, 10,000 talents of gold bullion. Enough money to run a small kingdom for a year. But the same minister seeing a simple servant who owed him 100 denarii, the money a labourer would earn in a day, has him placed in prison until he pays this amount off. The King is furious and calls him back to say he should have showed his servant the same mercy he had been shown. He has learnt nothing from the King's amazing generosity. The king is obviously a symbol of divine mercy. And Jesus calls all of us who hear him to share the same mercy and forgiveness with all those in our debt.

Later, the disciples ask Jesus to teach them a prayer that will mark them out as his disciples. He teaches them the Our Father. At its heart are the words "Forgive us our debts/trespases as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Forgiveness is so central to Jesus' teaching that we are to say to God "Don't forgive us unless we forgive others." When we say the "Our Father" we are asking God to help us forgive as he forgives. God's Holy Spirit will always help us to do this if we truly ask for the Spirit's help.

St. Paul tells us our lives are not just our own. We live in communion with all God's children. With the risen Jesus we are in union with all those saints and sinners living now, and all those who have gone before us into the promised, faithful loving-kindness of our reconciling, merciful God. Living the life of forgiveness is not without its tensions. Always in the Church there are groups who disagree with one another. Only when we realise we are all forgiven can we discover in our hearts the divine mercy that can set us free to live creatively together. Our whole Christian life is an education in forgiveness and mercy.

Questions for further exploration

Who do we need to forgive? Can we ask for God's help?

Do we need to forgive ourselves?

How can we serve God by showing forgiveness this week?

Who is a model of forgiveness for us?

Just as God forgives us, may we forgive each other.

Suggested prayer for further reflection

The "Our Father".

If you'd like to know more about our national God Who Speaks initiative and to share ideas, activities and resources on the Scriptures, go to: www.godwhospeaks.uk

Liturgy

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First reading: Sirach 27:30 - 28:7

Forgive your neighbour the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray.'

Psalm: Psalm 103(102): 1-2. 3-4. 9-10. 11-12. r. 8

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and rich in mercy.

Second reading: Romans 14:7-9

'Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.'

Acclamation before the Gospel: John 13:34

Alleluia, alleluia. A new commandment I give to you, says the Lord, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

Alleluia.

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.'

Quotes about education

Here are some quotes about education which may be of use in preparing homilies for Education Sunday.

Pope Leo XIV

From the Encyclical Letter *Magnifica Humanitas*, on safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence, 15 May, 2026:

"Schools are not called to follow the pace of the digital world, but to offer that which the digital sphere by itself cannot provide, namely a shared time for learning and developing trustworthy relationships." (147)

From the Encyclical Letter *Drawing New Maps Of Hope*, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Conciliar Declaration *Gravissimum educationis*, 2025:

"Education does not measure its value only on the axis of efficiency: it measures it according to dignity, justice, the capacity to serve the common good." (4.2)

"The Catholic school is an environment in which faith, culture and life intertwine. It is not simply an institution, but rather a living environment in which the Christian vision permeates every discipline and every interaction." (5.2)

St Pope John Paul II

From his address to the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Regions of Chicago, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee (USA) on their 'Ad Limina' visit, 30 May, 1998:

"Catholic education aims not only to communicate facts, but also to transmit a coherent, comprehensive vision of life, in the conviction that the truths contained in that vision liberate students in the most profound meaning of human freedom."

St Marie Eugenie

"In our mission of education, our first duty is to enlighten the mind with faith."

St Teresa of Ávila

"Untilled ground, however rich, will bring forth thistles and thorns; so also the mind of man."

Bidding prayers

Here are some prayer suggestions. Alternatively, pupils could write their own prayers.

We bring together our prayers to the Lord for the needs of the Church and of the world.

We pray that world leaders may be guided to see education as a source of hope for the future.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for all children around the world; that they may have the chance to change their lives for the better through education and look to the future with hope and happiness.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray that as a church family who are starting the new term together, we will all work hard to look after each other, particularly those who most need our care.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our school and all Catholic schools and universities in our area. We give thanks for the dedication, example and inspiration of school leaders, teachers and all who contribute to nurturing and supporting children and young people. May our school communities be filled with Jesus' compassion and love.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For all who are sick, particularly those attending or working in our schools and universities, may they be restored to fullness of health or come to know dignity in their suffering.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who have recently died, including those whose anniversaries are at this time.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant, we pray, O Lord,
that what your people ask in fitting prayer
they may receive by your mercy.
Through Christ our Lord.

Social media guide

The following tips can help your school and parish use social media for Education Sunday and beyond.

If your school doesn't have a social media account, for example with X (formerly Twitter), or Bluesky, Facebook and Instagram, it only takes a few minutes to set one up. However, please ensure your content, especially all photos of children, is in line with your online safety policy and that you apply appropriate security settings to your account.

This can be useful for promoting the work of the school and linking to other organisations. Posts are short and you can also include photos and videos.

- Use a brief and easy-to-remember handle.
- Put key information in the 'about' section – website and name of your school.
- Follow and post/repost people and schools who do similar work to your own.
- Follow the Catholic Education Service to find out what other Catholic schools are up to for Education Sunday. You can follow the Holy Father, bishops, cathedrals, parishes and more.
- Some other good accounts to follow are the local BBC news and your local newspaper. If you post lots of content about an interesting event at your school, a local journalist might decide to write a story about it.
- You can also follow the account of your local MP, who may wish to pay a visit to your school.
- Don't post too much, think about your audience, and make sure access to the account is secure.
- Make sure the content of your posts never reveals personal details of staff or students.
- Look at and use trending topic hashtags in your posts to reach a wider community.
- Don't forget to post about the religious aspects of your school - photos from Mass, collective worship or pilgrimages provide interesting content.
- If you have photo and video content people are much more likely to engage with it if it has a visual component and isn't just a sentence.
- Once your account is up and running, get ready to post about Education Sunday.
- Repost content, especially about Catholic education and school governance.
- You could get individual staff and students to post about why they love their Catholic school.
- Providing you have permission, post photos of all the events you run about Education Sunday.