

Address to Standard Five Students

Scared Heart Girls' R.C. School

JUNE 29, 2018

1. Good afternoon girls

My first word must be one of thanks to all the teachers of standard five (5) for the kind invitation to address you the students of standard five, on the topic of Integrity. I consider it a rare honour indeed and I will remember and cherish this honour for quite some time in the future.

2. Name: My name is Justice Melville Baird. My actual name is Melville Baird and the 'Justice' is my title. The 'Justice' means that I am a Judge and although I am now retired I retain that title. I was Judge of the High Court here in Trinidad and Tobago and on my retirement I was appointed International Judge by the United Nation. As International Judge I travelled to Holland in Europe and there I presided at an International Criminal Court for seven (7) years. On my return to Trinidad I was appointed Chairman of the Integrity Commission.

3. What is Integrity Commission and what are its functions?

The Integrity Commission was created by law; that law is an Act of Parliament described as the Integrity in Public Life Act. The Integrity Commission is a very important Commission in TT and it plays a significant role in the country.

The Integrity Commission is designed to prevent corruption of certain Government officials by requiring them to file declarations of all the money and property they own as well as all the debts they owe. These persons who are required to file declarations are referred to by the law as "persons in public life". So if, depending on the job you are doing, you are considered to be a person in public life by the law, then you must file a declaration with my Commission setting out your income, that is, the money you are earning; your assets, that is property you own such as land, shares etc. and your liabilities, that is what you owe, your debts.

The law also requires the Integrity Commission to regulate the conduct of persons holding office in certain government boards, commissions and authorities and to maintain the integrity of public officials and institutions. Such persons are referred to by the law as ‘persons exercising public functions’.

The law requires the Integrity Commission to do other things but I will not burden you with that.

So as you can see, the Integrity Commission has very wide powers and because of that my work is very secret and confidential.

The Integrity Commission is made up of five members and I am the Chairman. The Commission also has a staff of twenty-one officers and I am the Head. The motto of the Integrity Commission is ‘Do the Right Thing Always’.

4. I was extremely happy to attend your graduation ceremony at Queens Hall a few weeks ago. I congratulate you all on your graduation and wish you all success in your SEA results.

At the graduation ceremony I was impressed by your achievements but I was particularly impressed by your excellent approach to Integrity and by your motto: “Be the change you wish to see in the world”.

If therefore you wish to see a change in this country to greater integrity, then YOU must be that change; You, the girls of standard five of Sacred Heart R.C. School must begin the change towards greater integrity in TT.

5. And what is ‘Integrity?’ We hear the word ‘Integrity’ every day but what is Integrity?

There are several meanings of the word integrity. Some are: freedom from moral corruption, uprightness of character, honesty, sincerity. But in all, there is a common element that is, doing the right thing always. Let us take the first one, ‘freedom from moral corruption’. If you are free from moral corruption it means that you are doing the right thing. The second one, ‘uprightness of character’. If you have uprightness of character, that means that you are doing the right thing always. The third one, ‘honesty’. If you are honest, you are doing the right thing

always. The fourth one, 'sincerity'. If you are a sincere person you are a person who is doing the right thing always.

If you are one or more of the above, then you are a person of integrity.

6. I now come to the part of my address where I want you to help me. Are there any exceptions to the motto: do the right thing always? Are there any occasions when you CANNOT do the right thing and that would be alright?

Let us take an example. And I need you to help me with this example.

Example

- Let us consider a girl of your age, in a class similar to yours standard five. Let us call that girl Mary. Mary has some very close friends in school and the parents of her friends all brought their daughters bicycles. Mary therefore wants a bicycle so she can ride along with her friends.
- Mary goes to her parents and asked them for a bicycle; her parents however tell her that they cannot afford to buy a bicycle.
Mary is very disappointed and she is in tears when she sees her friends riding their bicycles going to the park and enjoying themselves. She asks her mother to buy her a bicycle, her mother tells her she cannot afford a bicycle. She is very disappointed and she cries as she sees her friends riding their bicycles on their way to the park and enjoying themselves.
- Next day on her way home from school, walking alone, because her friends are all riding their bicycles; walking alone she decides to take a short cut to avoid having to meet her friends with their bicycles. This short cut is a very quiet road, no traffic, nobody walking on the road; she is the only person on that road.
As she turns a corner on that very quiet road, there is a wallet lying on the ground in the middle of the road.

- There is no one around. She takes up the wallet and opens it and sees that the wallet is packed with blue notes; only blue notes. There is enough money in that wallet to buy the bicycle and also jeans and sneakers.
- Now girls, I want you to bear this in mind. This is not a busy road where there are people around, where people are walking and jogging, where cars are passing by. No. This is a very lonely road, with no one around. Nobody is seeing her and she has in her hand a wallet filled with money that would enable her to buy that bicycle that she so badly needs so that she can ride with the friends.
- If you were Mary, what would you do? (Get students to answer).

‘IF IT IS NOT YOURS DO NOT TAKE IT’ (class repeats)

Bear this in mind at all times.

Integrity means doing the right thing at all times, whether you are being seen by others or not; whether you are in a crowd or you are alone; wherever you are and with whom so ever you are.

If a person shows integrity only when she is being seen by others, but when she is alone, when there is no one around she abandons her integrity and does not do the right thing then that person is not really a person of integrity. She is a fraud, she is a hypocrite. You would not be like that hypocritical person.

Integrity is an inner quality. Integrity comes from within you and as such it is part of you; wherever you are, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for weeks a month, twelve months a year. And because integrity is part of you, it would not be difficult for you to do the right thing always.

So when Mary found that wallet filled with money, if she were a person of integrity, the first thought that would come to her mind would be ‘ I have to take this wallet to the proper authorities’. This thought would overcome all thoughts about bicycle, jeans sneakers. Her first thought would be to do the right thing and take the wallet to the proper authorities so the rightful owner can come and collect it.

7. Very soon you will be entering secondary school. I am sure you have been told this but I will also tell you: prepare yourselves for the change.

8. Put the Lord first in everything you do. Let Him be your constant Companion. Be aware of His presence. Speak with Him. Ask Him for guidance, For help, For counsel. He wants you to ask Him for these things. He wants to be involved in your lives, but you must ask Him in; you must invite Him in.

9. Make sure you go to Sunday Mass and Communion; make sure you go to Confession.

10. In your new school you will be extremely careful about your close friends. Choose them wisely. Let your parents meet them. There is the old saying: “show me your friends and I will tell you who you are”. You will avoid friends whose outlook is very different from yours. You would avoid friends who will pull you in one direction only: down.

11. If you find yourself in a situation where all the students are doing something wrong; where they are doing something which you consider not to be the correct thing, you must stand up for what is right. It does not matter what they say to you or about you, you stand up for what is right. Do not go along with something that you know is wrong, just to please the crowd. You will resist the peer pressure. You will stand firm.

12. And I must say that those very students who might criticize you for standing up for what is right, deep down inside they would admire you for your integrity.

13. Let your light shine before your fellow students. Strive to set a good example at all times for the benefit of your fellow students. And this good example must be in words and in deeds. Let them always hear you saying the right thing, let them always see you doing the right thing.

14. I am certain that your teacher would have told you about this, but I would like to add a few words of my own. Be very careful about what you look at online.

You could use a very simple test: if what you want to look at online is something about which you would not want your mother or your teacher to know, then that means that you ought not to look at it. Girls, I ask you to be very careful about the internet. Of course, there are several very good and educational programmes, but at the same time there are also some very dangerous ones. So let your parents and your teachers be your guide as to which programmes you should choose to view.

15. As you enter this new phase in your lives I ask you to keep in mind what I have told you; and I would summarise it very quickly for you:

- Put the Lord first in everything you do; get Him involved in every aspect of your lives.
- Attend Sunday Mass and receive Holy Communion; you would also go to Confession as often as possible.
- Stand up fearlessly and firmly for what is right.
- Be good examples to your fellow students and let your light shine before them.
- Make a difference; be the change you wish to see in the world and do the right thing always.