

Finding God is Easy with Third Grade Angels
By Dr. Kathy Perencevich, (Dr. P.), Third Grade Teacher, SFIS

Flashback to May 27th, 2016. I'm running down the hallway, ten steps behind our "Third-Grade Angels." I'm juggling bobby pin bows, luau skirts, and the "dab-superman-bop-bop-bop" t-shirts that the children designed. It's the long awaited night of the talent show. A parent jokes as she watches me trail behind, "who's the leader of this gaggle of kids anyway?" I grin, holding back all of the quips swirling in my head. Alas, I settle for a smile because I know that no words could describe my feeling of genuine pride knowing that I would gladly follow behind these children, carrying all of their gear, any day, anywhere, any time. Indeed, I know that the true leader of this gaggle is God.

Yes, it's May at Saint Francis International School (SFIS) and the metamorphosis of these children could not have been more complete. This is the month that is the culmination of all of their lessons. They have experienced God in all that they have done. They have raked leaves, tilled soil, and planted trees. They have become avid gardeners, who, not only sowed vegetables to feed the school, but they sowed joy with every harvest. They have become lectors and gift-bearers for our weekly Masses. They have become authors, who have written books about birds that they studied for months. They have become ambassadors of peace in the playground. They have organized and cooked a breakfast to thank all of the janitors, administration, and cafeteria workers who served them throughout the year. Indeed, at the ripe age of nine-years-old, they have been transformed into students, who know that their identities as God's children will carry them through the triumphs and troubles that life will bring.

Life isn't easy for these young children. Some struggle with reading and writing. Some worry about their dads, who must travel to find work. Some have to walk to school, even when it pours rain for two straight weeks. Some worry about their moms, who work two jobs and still manage to cook, clean, help with homework and get them to school on time. And like most children their age, they worry about friendships and fitting in and doing well in school and standing up when it counts and doing the right thing when everyone else seems to be doing wrong. It's part of growing up and they come to realize that they will have to work very hard to learn and grow in spite of all the difficulties they face. However, the difference here at SFIS is that God is at the heart of all they do. When my students understand their identity as children of God, who were born for a purpose, then hope, joy and abundance are theirs for the taking.

Watching my students perform at the talent show for the past two years solidifies what I know to be true; God is here. I watch with deep satisfaction knowing the background stories that brought us to this moment. After studying mighty women, like Malala Yousafzai, our Mother Mary, and Mother Teresa, my girls who were painstakingly shy in September, are now belting out, "It's a Beautiful Day," so loud and proud. Yes, God is here.

There's also the "Whip Nae Nae" group with their dab-superman t-shirts on. I smile knowing their story. It was late into rehearsal season when a boy with some learning challenges approached me to ask if he could join that dance group of boys, who were so inseparable, that I called them "The Three Musketeers." Hoping and praying that all of the lessons of third grade would come together, I explained that he had to ask the group by himself. I held my breath as I watched the little guy ask "The Three Musketeers" if he could be in their group for the talent show. Daniel immediately put his arm around the boy and said, "Yeah dude, which part of the dance can you do?" When they all high-fived each other, I knew that God is here.

When the leader of another group showed me her group's song choice and it was, "Cheerleader," I thought it had a fun beat and I knew that the artist singing the song was from Jamaica, her dad's country. But when I prayed on it that night, I knew I had to tell that group that I didn't want them to be cheerleaders for anyone but God. They agreed and chose the "Happy" song instead. Yes, God is here.

This week, another school year begins. As I welcome my new class, I recall a quote from Mother Teresa, which resides deep in my soul; "Do ordinary things with extraordinary love." With that, I begin again, "Welcome boys and girls! Something very big has just happened to you as you entered this room! You have become God's "Third Grade Angels!" As they all applaud and hug each other in the morning meeting, I know that indeed, God is here in all His glory and blessings abound in the ordinary here at SFIS.

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