



GREGORY
THE GREAT
A C A D E M Y

Christmas 2021

Dear <<<<<<<NAME>>>>>>>>,>

Before I tell you about your beautiful handmade Christmas present from Gregory the Great Academy, I have a little something to share with you myself that brings out a unique and essential aspect of our school...

...and of Christmas, too.

As often happens, I ran into visiting parents at one of our soccer games this year and also at our banquet celebrating All Saints Day. At both times, I began speaking with them right beside a crowd of our boys who, in one case, were singing and laughing and carrying on to cheer for the Highlanders, and in the other, were singing and laughing and carrying on in enjoyment of the Feast Day.

As you can imagine, it was rather difficult to converse under these boisterous circumstances—with boys roaring a song, hoisting each other in the air, jumping and jostling, and all the rest of it—and at some point I made a passing apology for the brouhaha.

“No, don’t apologize for them,” was the correction I immediately received, with something far more sincere than an obligatory courtesy.



Luke Culley
Headmaster



“It is so wonderful that they do this—there is nowhere else in this country, maybe in the world, where boys play like this.”

How true that is. It is almost ridiculous how one can get used to the most wonderful things in the world and forget how wonderful they are. I was grateful for that reminder of how good our noisy boys are when they play, for play, be it ever so noisy, is an act of innocence and security that is becoming lost, even among the young, *and even at Christmas time*—the time of year when children at play should enliven every home.

And our boys do play, thanks be to God. They have a freedom and a happiness that allows them to play in a way that those burdened with the cynicism and self-consciousness of the age sadly cannot. I recall a passage in *A Christmas Carol* where Dickens describes a family of rollicking youngsters at Christmas time with these words:

The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem, they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty.

I have witnessed the same play and the same noise at this school on many occasions. In fact, the Latin word for “school,” “*ludus*,” is also the Latin word for “play,” and sometimes a school of play like ours can get a little loud.

But St. John Bosco, that master teacher and patron of boys, wrote this regarding boyish ruckuses:

“Don’t worry about a small brief outburst of enthusiasm; join in the noise. If the noise is by chance, necessary for the merry-making, whip it up. Joy is indispensable. Let it be everywhere; in the school and in the church.”

So do we strive to whip up the joyful play of our boys, and Christmas is a perfect time to remember the importance of play, even rambunctious play. As I see it, play is both the beginning and the end of wisdom, as it delights in truth before it is fully known and then again, once it is known. *The delight that introduces children to the world, and to the work of the world, regains its sway once that world and its work has been undertaken and understood as good, true, and beautiful.*

In other words, play prepares the young for serious engagement, but that labor in turn prepares people to play again in old age.





This is nothing more than the great game of salvation, and it is one that was winkingly begun when God became a Child in Bethlehem. *The Book of Proverbs* says that Wisdom was with God from the beginning, playing in His presence and in His creation—a lovely thought and image. We, too, are called to play before Christ, just as the juggling clown did before the statue of the holy Mother and Child in the old Christmas story.

This is the play of Gregory the Great Academy, and its energy inspires the prayers and labors of our boys as well. Only boys who play as our boys play, can sing Compline as our boys do. Young people who don't laugh freely with each other in the joys of friendship don't wonder and engage with the joys of geometry or literature or Scripture as readily. It is because we have noisy soccer

games, booming banquets, and halls that ring with life, that we give our students a sanctuary of peace and growth as they train to become good laborers in the vineyard.

And that, my friend, brings me to your gift.

As a token of gratitude from these fine young men whose play is preparing them to become workers in the world, we would like to offer you a Christmas ornament we made out of beeswax. Beeswax, as you may know, is produced by worker bees to construct the honeycomb, and as such it stands as a good symbol for our students as we pray that their collective work to build new strongholds of Catholic culture proves as rich and beautiful.

I recently attended a Catholic men's conference with our boys where a priest pointed out that *our hearts must be as soft as wax if they are to receive and hold the imprint of Christ*, for, if they are hard, they will break in coming into contact with the Word Made Flesh. Christmas is the time for that encounter, for that greatest of impacts, when Jesus came to earth as one of us, to impress the seal of His Divine Image on our hearts.

To receive and retain the Image of Christ is our mission, and you are a part of it. You have done so much to help prepare the hearts of these boys to be as yielding and pure as wax so that they can take on the character of Christ and then, in turn, help prepare the hearts they meet in their lives for the same stamp of salvation.

But none of this would be possible without your gifts, your prayers, and your support of Gregory the Great Academy.

We need YOU now more than ever, for it is in these times of confusion and fear that the call sounds out for the



Light of the World, brought to us through the Virgin's purity, like the wax of a candle. These boys, too, are like wax that can bear His Image and carry His Light into the shadows, bringing the hope that makes faith stand strong.

**Please make a donation this Christmas
to help prepare the hearts of our students,
and in so doing, you will make your own ready.**

Know that your generosity is bestowing a beautiful life of prayer and work and play, which together comprise a complete education. We must play well in all stages of life and learning so that the delights of the visible and invisible may themselves play a part in every soul's journey to heaven.

Thank you for your gift. I hope you enjoy ours, and may you have a very merry and clamorous Christmas!

In the Newborn Christ,


Luke Culley

PS: Of course, the lesson of play is one taught to us every Christmas when we remember how the Blessed Virgin played with God as He lay in her lap. **Thank you for making our play possible with your gift to the boys of Gregory the Great Academy and I hope you enjoy the Christmas ornament we made for you.**

