

The Work of Resurrection

-February 2021-

"Hurry then, take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of your institute is, before all, to sanctify youth."

-Basil Moreau, Christian Education, 1856

One of the most important, but often unspoken, tasks of any new teacher is to learn how to develop a persona. A persona is the particular external way that we interface with the world around us. Literally meaning "to sound through," personas were the masks that were used on stage in ancient tragedies. Their purpose, as such, was to create clear channels of communication and clearly defined relationships among the actors. When one's persona is "on," other people know the rules of engagement - you don't talk to your personal trainer at the gym, for example, the same way you would talk to the Pope - and the interaction among all of those involved becomes predictable, safe and lifegiving. While there are some of us who want to be totally stripped of that false outer self and reject the notion of a persona altogether, we should not be naive about the rawness of human interaction and relationships - intense it is indeed to spend six hours every day in a box with twenty-five young people! Rather, the goal is to develop a kind of intellectual, psychological and emotional operating system that is able to navigate and integrate the myriad of encounters that happen in the course of a school day into one's deeper being. Even when we go home to our families or out with our friends, we are still "persona-ed," to a lesser degree and in a different way. The point is that the persona, so long as it does not consume us, is a necessary apparatus for the rational soul which constantly seeks to find healthy and sustainable ways to create connections and enter more fully into life.

Here are some questions to consider as this persona-development process unfolds on our journeys as Holy Cross Educators: Is my persona efficient? Does my operating system account for all of the persons and interactions that are a part of my daily experience in the schoolhouse? Is my persona durable? Does my particular way of interfacing with the world around me help to take the edge off and make me free at a deeper level? Does my persona allow me to be an intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and psychologically healthy person? Am I able to come to school in the morning with a positive mindset and an eager spirit to undertake the work that I am called to do there? When I go home in the evening, am I still energized and fresh enough to be available to my family and present to other important people in my life? Have I had those months or years when the mask took root in a way that made me feel like I was in teacher-mode all of the time? Have I ever spent time in the summer reflecting on my particular style at school - too sarcastic, too loose, too strict, too informal, too negative, too nonchalant, etc. - and did I do anything about it? Would I be willing to spend some time each day, maybe in the evenings before going to bed, meditating on the life of Jesus, who, in our tradition, is literally called the Second *Persona* of God"?

I can remember how much I wanted to be in classrooms coming out of college. There was just so much energy in schools and there was a great desire in me to help build up society by forming positive relationships with kids. You can imagine how my idealism and naivete gave way to disillusionment after the second month when those very kids whom I loved and wanted to serve took advantage of me and exploited every gap in my lessons and every mistake in my instruction! What helped me to preserve my center (and sanity!) through it all was the gradual formation of an exterior, or facade, where all of the personalities and communication and situations could be confronted before being acted upon or responded to. Like the administrative assistant who assuages an angry parent or sizes up a vendor who comes to see the principal - all the while maintaining total cheerfulness and professionalism - my persona became my best and most important companion in the classroom that gave me the security and confidence that I could form a relationship with each and every one of those teenagers within the very mess of those four walls. As Holy Cross Educators, who are called to "cross borders of every sort" (*Constitutions*, 2:12), we must simply find effective systems of interfacing so that the deep truth of the Good News might be boldly and clearly "sounded through" our daily interactions with our students.