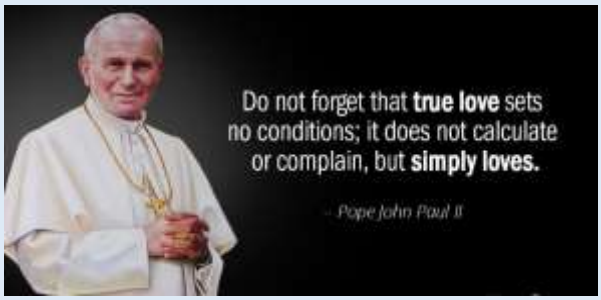
What are 'Gospel Values'?

The use of the term 'values' in relation to the content and message of the Gospel is relatively modern. Indeed, the use of the term 'values' relating to moral beliefs and attitudes is also quite recent. It is important to understand what lies behind the use of this term today.

The German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) used the term 'values' in opposition to any concept of an objective moral law. For Nietzsche values were subjective and relative; for him there are no objective virtues or vices, good or evil, right or wrong that are true for all and for all time. 'Values', in this sense, are subjective and refer to whatever an individual thinks is right or true for a particular set of circumstances and at a certain point in time.

This use of the term values has been absorbed into the vocabulary of modern society. In this context, values are often subjective, regarded as a question of personal preferences - what is right for 'me' or the community to which I belong. However, modern society still talks of, and to varying degrees promotes, a set of core human values or principles that are objective, trans-cultural, and universal, for example: responsibility, compassion, respect for others and honesty. Such core values and principles lay at the heart of the laws and ethics that govern societies and nations.

Blessed Pope John Paul II, in his writings and homilies, consistently used the term 'values' in ways that challenge modern societies and cultures to re-discover the foundation of their core values and principles: "An urgent task awaits you: to re-establish the bonds which have been strained and sometimes broken between the cultural values of our time and their lasting, Christian foundation."



This is reflected in statements of the Church relating specifically to Catholic [Church] schools: "For this reason the Catholic [Church] school, in committing itself to the development of the whole man, does so in obedience to the solicitude of the Church, in the awareness that all human values find their fulfilment and unity in Christ."

The term 'Gospel values' is commonly used in Catholic [Church] schools and other Catholic [Church] institutions; however, unless the term is unpacked and a common understanding formed of what true Gospel values are, there is a danger that what should be an objective Christian foundation, will itself become a random list of subjective values.

Whilst other 'values' may be found within the four Gospels and New Testament writings, it is the Beatitudes which: "…depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity". Gospel values cannot therefore be values chosen subjectively from the vast corpus of the Old and New Testaments but are objective values revealed to us through Christ's proclamation.

Such objective values are to be found rooted in the Beatitudes, the proclamation of Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes also "…reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts" and as such are the objective 'values' given by Christ himself.

Whilst not definitive, the Gospel values based on the Beatitudes may be summarized as follows:



"*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven*"
Values: Faithfulness & Integrity

"*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*"
Values: Dignity & Compassion

"*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth*"
Values: Humility & Gentleness

"*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*"
Values: Truth & Justice

"*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*"
Values: Forgiveness & Mercy

"*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God*"
Values: Purity & Holiness

"*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God*"
Values: Tolerance & Peace

"*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven; they persecuted the prophets before you in the very same way*"
Values: Service & Sacrifice

We would expect any visitor to our school to see these values throughout our school … in the spiritual life of the school, way we treat one another, the curriculum, extra-curricular and super-curricular activities that we operate and the enrichment opportunities that staff and students have.

Gospel values "*… are a guarantee of peace and of collaboration among all citizens in the shared commitment to serving the common good*". Rooted in the teaching of Christ, these Gospel values should constitute the targets and outcomes of the educational enterprise in every Catholic [Church] school.

For this to be possible, these Gospel values need to be explicitly named, their meaning unpacked and pupils helped to understand how they relate to their lives both at school, at home and in society. This enterprise is not in addition to the quest for high academic standards and vocational excellence but integral to it: "*Catholic [Church] schools, while providing a quality education, hold up Christian values to children, inviting them to build their own lives on them. Teaching these values, for those who know how to accept and live them consistently, yields highly positive results - as experience confirms - at the personal, family and professional levels.*"