Summer Reading Requirement - English IV

A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest J. Gaines

Summary:

Set in a small Cajun town in Louisiana in 1948, A Lesson Before Dying depicts a young black man’s journey on death row after he is falsely accused of murder. Jefferson is an unsuspecting bystander in a liquor store robbery that results in the murder of the owner. Jefferson’s aunt (Emma) persuades family friend and plantation schoolteacher (Grant Wiggins) to visit Jefferson in jail to teach him how to die with dignity. Wiggins is the reluctant teacher who eventually becomes the student. Ultimately, A Lesson Before Dying is a story of personal redemption in the face of life’s most difficult circumstances.

Instructions:

1. Purchase your own copy of A Lesson Before Dying.
2. Read and annotate the book, paying close attention to the themes and motifs including:
   * Courage/Bravery
   * Prejudice
   * Institutionalized injustice
   * Walking in someone else’s shoes
   * Education: formal (school) vs. informal (outside of school)
   * Innocence/Coming of Age
3. Catholic World View:

   **Include 10 highlighted passages** on the EACH of the following topics:
   
   **Responsibility**: As Catholics, “the duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (CCC 1932). Grant initially rejects Miss Emma’s request “to make Jefferson a man.” Is Jefferson Grant’s responsibility? How does Grant gradually come to accept this responsibility?

   **Redemption**: Jefferson is stripped of human dignity through institutional injustices, but Miss Emma works to restore and redeem his dignity. How do Miss Emma, Reverend, and Grant view redemption? Does each believe that redemption is possible for men like Jefferson? Do their opinions reflect the Catholic Church’s position that “the redemption won by Christ consists in this, that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28), that is, he "loved [his own] to the end" (Jn 13:1), so that they might be "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] fathers" (1 Pr 1:18). CCC 622

Your book, complete with annotations, is **due the first day of class**. Your grade will be based upon the thoroughness and accuracy of your annotations (see St. James website for a review of instructions for annotating a book).

I look forward to working with you next year. If you have any questions regarding this assignment, please e-mail Colleen Kolich at ckolich@sjakeepingfaith.org.

Have a safe and fun summer.