

## Baccalaureate Mass + Pentecost + 19 May 2024

As I was preparing for this Mass, I realized that it has been 25 years since my high school graduation. I'm old! I don't remember any particular speeches from graduation, so you probably won't remember mine either! But we know that one man's words continue to live through time, even though uttered nearly 2,000 years ago: Jesus Christ. So let's listen then to His words, especially as they relate to this celebration today.

Our Gospel today is from when Jesus was just about to undergo His own "commencement." Now "commencement is actually a very accurate word for feast we are celebrating today: Pentecost. These days, we typically use this word to mean "graduation"—the end of something, but it actually means the beginning. So also Jesus' ascension into heaven, when His bodily presence would no longer be with us on earth, is just the beginning of a new phase of His presence with us. By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, first given at Pentecost, Jesus is no longer limited by space and time; He can be everywhere, in the hearts of everyone who would believe in Him and be Baptized into His name.

I think it is also interesting that Christ's final words to His closest collaborators—His disciples—in our Gospel today are very brief, but also very important. First, He says, *Peace be with you*. Now that must be very important, because He actually says it twice. And His words are accompanied by actions: *when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side*. Why His hands and side? Remember, these are the parts of His glorified body that still bear the wounds of the Cross, and they will for all eternity. Just think of that!

Say, for example, you got in a car accident that wasn't your fault, and for the rest of your life you have a limp or a scar from your injuries. This means that for the rest of your life, you have a physical reminder of what someone else did to you. Those wounds might easily become a source of bitterness and resentment. Christ bore His wounds for us: our sins put Him on that Cross. Yet He bears no bitterness or resentment against us. To make that abundantly clear, He announces to the whole world the fruit of the Cross: God's *peace*.

I'm not sure if when you are young you quite realize how much the human person desires peace. This desire, for instance, explains why so many people have cottages on the lake: you feel your blood pressure dropping as you go up that hill just north of Clare and are now "up north." Yet those times are never enough, are they? As good as our times up north or our vacations are, we are always left wanting more. Want a peace that stretches out into eternity, which means we want peace that the world cannot give. Only God can give it.

So what gets in the way of such peace? Not just the reality of limited time, but more often the circumstances of our lives also rob us of peace. Sometimes it's what others do to us. Sometimes it's what we do to ourselves that robs us of peace. Ultimately, it is sin—our sins and the sins of the world that rob us of peace. And there's really nothing much we can do about this on our own. So God made a way for peace on the Cross, because He made a way

for divine mercy. He opened the door to forgiveness, to a second chance in this life. Above all, on the Cross, He opened the gates of the eternal peace that is heaven. Remember Heaven is the immediate presence of God, which means it is possible to be there now, in part, through our relationship with God. Christ's Cross, death, resurrection, ascension into heaven, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit is all part of God's perfect plan of peace.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing Jesus says in our Gospel today: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.* Now this was first a commission of the disciples, who are now Apostles: meaning, those who are sent. But it also extends to us: we are now sent to be agents of the mercy of God. By undoing the sin of the world, we also become agents of His peace.

St. Therese once said that *grace is everywhere.* And that is true. But it also needs to be embodied to realize its full potential. Last week I went on field trip with school children to planetarium and was struck by the reminder that light in and of itself is invisible to the human eye. Only when it comes into contact with an object and "bounces off" it, so to speak, is light visible. It is the same with grace. God's grace is everywhere, but it needs Christians to reflect it in the world to make it known: to make God known. Just as people went crazy over the solar eclipse a few weeks back, today, we have an eclipse of God. God's warming rays are ever shining, but we've put so much before God that many fail to see Him. Above all, our human pride has swelled to the size of the sun.

Because of advances in science, most people, in the developed world at least, don't think they need God. Science has replaced our need for God, so it is said. Now I am grateful for science. I'm grateful for the electricity that fuels our church air conditioners. I was grateful for antibiotics when I had a particularly painful sinus infection. But no pill, no technology, can ever completely cure all that ails the human heart. Honest scientists know this is true.

And so the world needs witnesses to God, who has revealed Himself in Christ. All of us are called to be witnesses. And it's not easy to be a witnesses, especially these days. People seem to be hypersensitive, as if always on the lookout for a reason to be offended. But that's just the point: the Christ cuts through all the haze of our differences and brings peace. But in order to do that, He often first has to bring the sword of the Spirit. Sometimes, there is no other way to cure an infection than by cutting it open. But to ignore it, to redefine it, or to say it is someone's "life-choice," is not a true act of love—it is not the way of Christ.

Finally Graduates, you have heard and will hear a lot in the coming days about your career. Your career is important, no doubt about it. I'm very grateful the folks that keep our roads clear in the winter. I'm very grateful for the farmers who bring food to my table each day, and so on. But your career is not an end in itself, and it will not be your greatest source of peace or joy. I've never known anyone who asked for their awards, their colleagues, or their bank statements to surround them on their deathbed. No, we want family, and we

want the Church—we want God to be there in the hours when our humanity is most fully made manifest: at birth, and at death.

And the truth is that God is with us, every moment of every hour of every day, if we just let Him in. His Holy Spirit is alive and powerful, just waiting to be unleashed in our lives, in order to *renew the face of the earth*; a renewal that our world needs desperately today.