

**Saint Teresa High School Baccalaureate Mass
Saint Teresa High School, Decatur, Illinois
May 8, 2017**

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, faculty, staff, students, graduates and their family and friends, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to celebrate this Baccalaureate Mass in conjunction with the graduation of the senior class of St. Teresa High School. It is most fitting that today we come to the altar to offer our greatest form of thanksgiving to our Lord in the celebration of the Eucharist in gratitude for the many blessings that He has bestowed upon these students over the past four years.

Just a few minutes ago, we heard these words from the Gospel of Saint John:

I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.

If we take a moment to consider these words of Jesus, it should be easy for us to recognize that when our Lord was speaking to the disciples

about laying down His life for the sheep, Jesus was referring to His greatest act of love in which He laid down His life on the cross and, in doing so, gave a model of love and charity for us to follow in our own lives of faith.

As people of faith, it is only logical that since our Good Shepherd laid down His life for us, the question that we must ask ourselves is: “How do we in turn lay down our lives for Him and for others?” This question might seem rather morbid at first glance, however, it actually goes far beyond the literal understanding of laying down our lives. While there are many great saints who have indeed laid down their lives by offering them for the faith as martyrs, chances are that most likely you and I will not be asked to make this great sacrifice for our faith. Rather, it is our obligation to find ways to “die” to ourselves and show charity and love to those around us in our daily lives. We call that “mortification,” or dying to our own selfish desires.

Ultimately, this can be accomplished in a variety of ways. However, all of these ways start with a basic understanding of what it means to be Christ’s disciple in today’s world. To better understand this fundamental concept, it seems fitting to reflect on words that have been attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila, the patron saint of your school, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are

the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless His people.” If we use these words as a framework in which to live our lives and see our obligation to direct our actions in the imitation of our Lord, it is then that we begin to lay down our lives for God and others.

I would venture to guess that there are many people in your lives who have served as models of this as you have grown up. It is very likely that your parents, your first teachers, have made great sacrifices for you and for others throughout the course of your life. Additionally, your teachers, priests and others entrusted with your care and development have guided and shepherded you to this moment in time. Now, as you prepare to depart from your years of Catholic education here at St. Teresa High School, it is your turn to take these lessons and use them as an example of how to follow the Good Shepherd.

Please know that, as you embark on this next chapter of your lives, you will enter a world that does not always follow the call of our Lord to be His disciples on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, there will be many voices around you that encourage you to follow a way of life that promotes

one's self over the good of others and entices you to indulge your personal pleasures over focusing on the happiness that comes from having a right relationship with God, which leads to the goal of eternal life in Heaven.

You have received a great blessing in your Catholic education, from which you have been given the tools necessary to distinguish between the many voices calling out for you to follow. This formation in your faith, if used properly, will assist you in discerning the path to take in the many situations you will experience and the decisions you will make in the years ahead. By living your life according to the teachings of the Good Shepherd, you will come to experience what Christ promises when He says: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

This abundance of life that Christ promises is one that far exceeds anything this world may offer to you. Even though you may find fleeting pleasure in worldly things, they are just that, fleeting; they will not last. Whereas the peace and joy that comes from following our Lord will far exceed the things of this world and will remain for eternity in Heaven, the only goal which really matters for us as Christians.

Since I had the privilege of confirming many of you, you may remember that at Confirmation Masses I have made it my custom to sing a song in my homily for Confirmation. I feel that the song that I chose this year for Confirmation is quite appropriate for this occasion as well. Last summer at World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland, about 20,000 young people from North America gathered in a basketball arena for a Holy Hour, which included a song by Matt Maher called "Your Grace Is Enough." As I sing this song for you, I invite all of you to join in singing the refrain. It is my hope that as you embark on this new time in your lives that you will remember that even though you will not always have the many people around you who have shepherded you to this point, that Christ, the Good Shepherd, never leaves you, and that His Grace is Enough to sustain you in your lives of faith in the midst of the world.

Matt Maher - Your Grace Is Enough

Great is Your faithfulness, oh God
You wrestle with the sinner's restless heart
You lead us by still waters and to mercy
And nothing can keep us apart

So remember Your people
Remember Your children
Remember Your promise, oh God

Your grace is enough
Your grace is enough
Your grace is enough for me

Great is Your love and justice, God of Jacob
You use the weak to lead the strong
You lead us in the song of Your salvation
And all Your people sing along

So remember Your people
Remember Your children
Remember Your promise, oh God

Your grace is enough
Your grace is enough
Your grace is enough for me

As your bishop, I pray that you will always listen to the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and by depending on His grace remain close to Him and His Church.

May God give us this grace. Amen.