

BACCALAUREATE MASS FOR SACRED HEART-GRIFFIN HIGH SCHOOL

**Sangamon Auditorium, The University of Illinois at Springfield
Sunday, May 22, 2011**

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

Reverend Fathers, consecrated religious, faculty, staff, students, graduates and their families and friends, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

We have come here today to celebrate this Baccalaureate Mass in conjunction with the graduation of the senior class of Sacred Heart-Griffin High School. Being a bit of a word maven, I like to look up the etymology or origins of words. The word “baccalaureate” derives from the word “bachelor.” My dictionary gives three meanings for the word, “bachelor.” The third meaning is “an unmarried man.” An unmarried woman is sometimes called a “bachelorette.” While, as far as I know, all of our graduating seniors are unmarried, it’s safe to say that we are not here to celebrate that fact. The second meaning given is “a person who has received the basic academic degree conferred by a four-year college, university or professional school.” That doesn’t apply either, although we do hope that you graduates will go on to receive such degrees four years from now.

The third meaning given for “bachelor” in the dictionary is “a young knight who follows the banner of another.” I think that meaning actually fits quite well! You graduates are young knights and ladies who follow the banner of another. Whose banner is that? Of course, that would be the banner of our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ!

Catholic schools such as Sacred Heart-Griffin High School exist precisely to pass on our Catholic faith in Jesus Christ. Yes, we seek to provide a good education, quality sports programs and other extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for learning and growth in music, the arts and meaningful social interaction, and I am confident that you have received such opportunities at SHG. But those features can be found at many public high schools. What Catholic schools uniquely have to offer is the faith that motivates and inspires all that we do, the virtues and values that guide our actions, and the community of believers that help us to transcend our mundane realities and lead us to the mysteries of the divine.

All of this does not happen automatically, of course. I’ve been around long enough to know that years of Catholic education do not in and of

themselves guarantee that a person will lead a faith-filled life. God has given all of us a free will, and we know from the time of Adam and Eve that people have used that free will to turn their backs on God. I have also been around long enough to know that going on to college is a time when some choose to use their freedom to abandon the faith, or at least to take a vacation from the regular practice of the faith.

So I believe that a Baccalaureate Mass is a time not only to give thanks for the blessings of the past four years at Sacred Heart-Griffin High School, but also a time to look to the future and ask if you will follow the banner of Jesus Christ.

One of my favorite music groups is a British band called Coldplay. A few years ago they did a song called “Clocks” The following verse of that song ends with a very fitting question:

Confusion that never stops, closing walls and ticking clocks (gonna)

Come back and take you home, I could not stop, but you now know (singing)

Come out upon my seas, curse missed opportunities (am I)

A part of the cure, or am I part of the disease?

This song has a lot to say about us. Life is confusing, the walls may seem to be closing in on us, time marches on. The key question is in the last line: “Am I a part of the cure, or am I part of the disease?”

On the one hand:

If you're into drugs and alcohol, you're part of the disease.

If you're into selfish hedonistic pleasure, premarital sex, unwanted pregnancies and abortion, you're part of the problem.

If you're into crime, violence and abusing other people, you're part of the disease.

If you're into cheating and stealing, you're part of the disease.

On the other hand:

If you're into following the commandments, you're part of the cure.

If you're into living by the teachings of Jesus, you're part of the cure.

If you're into serving the community and helping the common good, you're part of the solution.

If you respect all human life from the moment of conception until natural death, you will help to make this world a better place.

In short, if you're into loving God with all your heart and mind and soul, and loving your neighbor as yourself, you're part of the cure.

But that's easier said than done. We need help to be part of the cure. Christ has given us the Church to be that helper and His Holy Spirit to be our guide.

All of today's readings have been about building up the Church, the Body of Christ. In the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear how the early Church began to organize itself by assigning jobs to different people. In our second reading, from St Peter's first letter, the man that Jesus called his rock and instructed to be the foundation of the new Church tells us that Jesus is the cornerstone of this new Church. Jesus is the stone around which the whole Church is aligned and made strong. We too are given important roles. We are all living stones in this Church of Christ. And our Gospel reading today tells us that Christ is the way to God and that belief in him will enable Jesus' followers to do great things.

Today's Gospel reading comes from the part of St John's Gospel that contains the teaching Jesus gave to his disciples during the Last Supper. It might seem strange to have a reading today, a few weeks after Easter, with

words Jesus spoke on Holy Thursday. But the theme of the reading is about what will happen when Jesus leaves his disciples, and so it makes sense to read it in this time of the Church's year between Easter and the celebration of Christ's ascension to heaven.

The message to the disciples is about the work they can achieve once Jesus has left them. And that work, we know, is the foundation of the Christian Church. Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to the Father, but that through their faith in him they will be able to perform even greater works than Jesus himself.

By describing himself in today's Gospel as "the Way, the Truth and the Life," Jesus shows his disciples how to achieve these great things. St Peter clearly took the message on board, as we heard in his letter today. And the message is the same for us. By keeping Jesus as the centre of our lives and building everything around our faith, we too can build on Christ and become those living stones St Peter encourages us to become.

May God give us this grace. Amen.