

**Homily for the Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Awards
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

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Reverend Fathers, [Deacons, consecrated men and women], members of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good that we are here to celebrate this Mass during which several women from throughout our diocese will receive the Our Lady of Good Counsel Women of Distinction Award.

Walking into any physical bookstore or browsing for books online, one will inevitably find titles which promise direction on any number of areas of life, including dieting, exercise, productivity, money, and relationships. The vast number of self-help books available is mind-boggling, leaving the reader overwhelmed and unsure even where to start in order to make progress.

The story is no different when it comes to growing in our spiritual lives as well. There are countless books that have been written that offer help with just about every area of living out our faith, including learning how to pray, how to live a moral life, and, most importantly, how to get to

Heaven! As with other self-help books, it can be a little daunting trying to figure out which book will give us the best bang for our buck. For us who are Christians, the best self-help book that we have sometimes gets overlooked. That book is, of course, the Bible.

When it comes to reading the Bible, we can still feel somewhat overwhelmed by the vast amount of content contained in its 73 books. If we narrow it down to focusing on the most important parts of the Scriptures, namely the four Gospels, there is still a lot to digest. The whole Christian message, however, can be summed up with one simple verse which comes from the expert on what it means to live a Christian life. That expert is, of course, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and her simple, yet profound advice we heard in our Gospel today: “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5).

This advice may sound a little simplistic, but in reality, it is the greatest advice one could hope to hear in living as a follower of Christ. This is one of the reasons why we invoke Mary under the title of Our Lady of Good Counsel, for her simple words of counsel to “do whatever He tells you” will always lead us to a deeper union with Jesus, the “Wonder-Counselor” (Isaiah 9:5) spoken of by the Prophet Isaiah.

Over the past two weeks, the Church, during her weekday liturgies, has been going through some of the most important teachings of Jesus on how to live a good and holy life. The Sermon on the Mount, found in chapters five through seven of St. Matthew's Gospel, offers guidance on a variety of subjects, including prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting St. Augustine, says the following about this important section on the Gospels:

If anyone should meditate with devotion ... on the sermon our Lord gave on the mount, as we read in the Gospel of Saint Matthew, he will doubtless find there . . . the perfect way of the Christian life. . . .

This sermon contains . . . all the precepts needed to shape one's life.¹

To return to the simple words of counsel from our Blessed Mother to “do whatever He tells you,” you cannot go wrong if you give special attention to His teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

I would like to pay particular attention to what the Lord teaches regarding doing good works. After all, it is the good works done by so many of you women that brings us here for this celebration today.

Just after the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us that “your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your

heavenly Father” (Matthew 5:16). There is no question that all of you have heeded this teaching, as your good works have been noticed by others who in turn have nominated you for this award. But, if we read on a little further, we hear Jesus say something that seems contradictory. He tells us to “take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father” (Matthew 6:1). So does Jesus want us to do good deeds or not?

The answer to this is easy: of course He wants us to do good deeds. After all, that is at the heart of Jesus’ double commandment of love toward God and neighbor. What the Lord is cautioning us about is the motivation behind our good deeds. We must do them for the right reason, that is, for the sole purpose of giving glory to God through those actions. We don not perform these deeds for the purpose of being recognized for what *we* have done, as nice as that may be, but for what *God* has done through us when we allow ourselves to be used as His instruments. That might make you feel a little uncomfortable as you are being honored today at this Mass. To quell that uneasiness, we can turn once again to Our Lady of Good Counsel who shows us by her example how to accept this honor.

In particular, we can look at Mary's *Magnificat* as the model to imitate in a situation such as this. *Magnificat* comes from the Latin word at the beginning of the song of praise that Mary voices on the occasion of her visit to her cousin Elizabeth. This beautiful prayer captures the humble attitude that she had in response to the great honor bestowed upon her in being chosen to be the mother of the Savior. Instead of accepting the praise given to her by Elizabeth as her own, she directs all of the glory to God as she says: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1:46-47). She is fully aware that this is not about her, but about magnifying the God who "has done great things" (Luke 1:49) for her. Her part was to say 'yes' to God's will in her life, a 'yes' that would benefit all of humanity, for it was through that 'yes' that salvation entered into the world.

This must be your attitude as well on an occasion such as this one. The honor and glory belongs to God alone for all of the contributions of our honorees, but we rejoice in the fact that they have said 'yes' to God's will in their lives, a 'yes' through which God has "done great things" for the benefit of the Church here in our diocese. Along with the example of Mary's obedience to God's will, these honorees encourage all of us to be

more open to His working through us, not to draw attention to ourselves, but to give glory to Him as we share in the work of the building up of His Church.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist today, we give thanks to God for His good works done through these women in particular and through all of the women of our diocese in general. All of the glory belongs to Him, and by embracing that attitude, we free ourselves to seek His glory in everything that we do as we strive daily to heed that simple, yet profound counsel from our Mother for a life of discipleship, to “do whatever He tells you.”

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ CCC, §1966; St. Augustine, *De serm. Dom.* 1,1:PL 34,1229-1230.