

**Homily for the Father McGivney High School Baccalaureate Mass
Father McGivney High School Chapel, Glen Carbon, Illinois
May 20, 2017**

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Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Fathers, faculty, staff, students, graduates and your 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 Father McGivney 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.

Not too long ago, a coordinator of religious education had planned an evening program in preparation for Confirmation of a group of eighth graders. One feature of the program was a diverse panel of people who had been enlisted to give testimonies about their faith to the eighth graders. All the high school seniors who were scheduled to speak had canceled within the past day, each with a legitimate excuse. As the coordinator was carrying materials for the program from his car to the parish hall, a ninth

grader names Doug came across the parking lot. The coordinator took a bold risk. He said, "Hey Doug, remember the witness panel that spoke to you last year?" "Yeah," Doug answered. The coordinator asked, "Think you could do that?" Pause. "Yeah. . . . I guess I could do that. Who else is doing it?" "It's just you, Doug." Big pause. "When is it?" "About an hour from now." REALLY big pause, and then, "I'll be there." He was barely a year older than the Confirmation class, and with less than an hour to prepare, he gave a great witness talk! How did he do it? A person of faith would recognize that he did it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Just a few moments ago, we heard our Lord instruct His disciples with the following words from the Gospel of Saint John:

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
And I will ask the Father, and he will give you
another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit
of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it
neither sees nor knows him. But you know him,
because he remains with you, and will be in you.

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 sending the Spirit of truth, Jesus was foreshadowing His sending of the Holy Spirit, our advocate and guide. We know that the great gift about

which our Lord was speaking was given to us for the first time at Pentecost where the Holy Spirit came to the disciples to strengthen them in their lives of faith. So too has the Holy Spirit been given to you by virtue of your Confirmation to strengthen you in your lives so that you may keep our Lord's commandments and be faithful to the life that Jesus calls you to live.

As people of faith, it is only logical for us to ask ourselves, what it means to keep our Lord's commandments on a daily basis and how we can rely on the grace of the Holy Spirit to sustain us in that goal. Ultimately, the answer to this question lies in our understanding of what it means to be Christ's disciple in today's world.

In order to understand what this means more fully, it is fitting to reflect on the lives that the saints, people who knew what it meant to keep our Lord's commandments and live as His disciples. One saint that articulated what it means to be Christ's disciple in the world today is Saint Teresa of Avila when she said, "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 to follow Jesus' commandment to love one another as He has loved us, it is then that we open ourselves to the grace of the Holy Spirit to follow Christ as His disciples in today's world.

Another role model to look up to is the namesake of your school, Father Michael McGivney. Although he is not yet canonized as a saint, we hope that he someday will be. On March 15, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI approved a decree recognizing Father McGivney's heroic virtue, thus declaring him "Venerable." A miracle attributed to McGivney's intercession is under investigation at the Vatican. If canonized, he would be the first American-born priest to gain that recognition, although we are also hoping that another American-born priest, Father Augustine Tolton from our own diocese, might receive that recognition. Father McGivney founded the Knights of Columbus, with a small group of parishioners, as a mutual aid society, to provide financial assistance to their widows and orphans in the event of the death of the men of his parish. The organization developed as a fraternal society that grew beyond his parish. He was also known for his tireless work among his parishioners. Father McGivney died

from pneumonia on the eve of the Assumption in 1890, when he was only 38 years old. His life of heroic virtue continues to inspire us today.

I would venture to guess that there are many people in your lives who have served as models of discipleship as you have grown up. It is very likely that your parents, your first teachers, have sought to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit in being true to our Lord's commandments throughout the course of your life. Additionally, your teachers, priests and others entrusted with your care and development have guided and you to this moment in time. Now, as you prepare to depart from your years of Catholic education here at Father McGivney High School, it is your turn to take these lessons and use them as an example of how to follow our Lord and live by His commandments in your daily lives.

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 our Lord, 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 have 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 supported you to this point, that our Lord, never leaves you, He has sent the Holy Spirit to help guide you through any situation 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 guidance of the Holy Spirit and by depending on the Lord's grace remain close to Him and His Church.

May God give us this grace. Amen.