

Homily for the Baccalaureate Mass for St. Teresa High School

**St. Teresa High School
Decatur, Illinois
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Striving to Live a Coherent Life in an Era of Incoherence

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

Reverend Fathers, faculty, staff, students, graduates and their family and friends, beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: It is good to be with you today to celebrate this Baccalaureate Mass in conjunction with the graduation of the senior class of St. Teresa High School. It is also a special occasion for me personally as I celebrate my 43rd anniversary of ordination as a priest today! With gratitude for the many blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon these students over the past four years as well as upon my priestly ministry for the past forty-three years, we come to the altar to offer our greatest form of thanksgiving to Him in the celebration of the Eucharist.

In his book, *A Brief History of Time*, the late theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking, who held Isaac Newton's chair as Professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge, wrote about a "physical quantity called entropy, which measures the degree of disorder of a system.

It is a matter of common experience that disorder will tend to increase if things are left to themselves.”

The theme of my homily this evening is “Striving to Live a Coherent Life in an Era of Incoherence,” and I am starting my discussion of this topic with the issue of entropy because I believe the cultural incoherence and disorder so characteristic of the world today is a manifestation of the law of entropy, “that in any closed system, disorder, or entropy, always increases with time.” This is true even in the Church when we seek to act without being open to the gift of grace. The fact that the Church is comprised of imperfect human beings means that our merely human constructs are subject to entropy, decay, and disorder. But the Church is a divine institution founded by Jesus Christ, who assured us that “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The fulfillment of Our Lord’s assurance obliges Christians to conform our human will to the divine will in carrying out the mission entrusted to the Church.

The *Book of Genesis* describes creation as beginning with chaos, out of which God brings order (cf. Gen. 1). We human beings are pro-creators when we cooperate and collaborate with God’s plan to bring order out of the chaos

that engulfs the universe due to the law of entropy. Such pro-creation requires coherence on a number of levels.

Christian teaching promotes coherence between faith and action, and consistency between thoughts, words and deeds. Such coherence is especially important when it comes to the reception of Holy Communion. What we do when we go to Mass and receive Holy Communion should not be disconnected from what we do during the rest of the week in all the activities of our daily life. If our actions do not reflect the beliefs we profess as Christians, then our lives are incoherent.

At the same time, the incoherence of our culture is evident in the confusion over many aspects of the world in which we live, such as the meaning of marriage, gender identity, and the sanctity of unborn human life.

Coherence is defined as “the quality or state of cohering, such as systematic or logical connection or consistency.” The verb “cohere” comes from the Latin *cohæreere*, which means “to cling together, to be united.”

Coherence, then, in the ecclesiastical context, refers to the logical connection and consistency between the faith that is professed and the actions that flow from that faith. Coherence in the Church also refers to the

faithful clinging together as part of a community, united in their beliefs and in the moral dimensions of their behaviors.

The Bible is clear about Eucharistic coherence as stated in Saint Paul, First Letter to the Corinthians (11:27), "Whoever eats unworthily of the bread and drinks from the Lord's cup makes himself guilty of profaning the body and of the blood of the Lord."

Since we are all sinners, who then is worthy to receive Holy Communion? The answer is in the declaration that we make during Mass when the priest says holds up the consecrated Host, the Body of Christ, for all to see and says, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." We respond, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed."

Thus, when we have committed any grave sin, before going to Holy Communion we should truly repent and confess our sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, who will give us absolution pardoning our sins.

In seeking Eucharistic coherence in an incoherent era, it is important to remember that the ultimate goal is conversion and readmission to communion, not exclusion and permanent expulsion from the community

of faith. Even when a difficult decision must be made not to admit someone to Holy Communion until there has been repentance and reconciliation, such discipline does not contradict the love by which it is motivated.

Today's first reading from the *Acts of the Apostles* tells us how Saint Paul went about calling the Gentiles of other lands to conversion. Paul has a vision calling him to go to Macedonia (16:6-10). Today's reading shifts to a sudden "we" narrative that suggests Luke, the author of the *Acts of the Apostles*, had joined the mission to Macedonia. They arrive at Philippi, a prominent city and a recipient of one of Paul's letters in the New Testament canon. Philippi marks the first Christian fellowship on European soil. Paul finds the city to be cosmopolitan, a people of quite diverse national and ethnic derivation. Such a considerable number are Roman citizens that Paul in Philippi uses language of civic identity to describe worthiness of the gospel of Christ (1:27). He encourages them to be Christians first and Romans second.

Our reading from *Acts* presents a woman named Lydia who deals in purple cloth, a color linked to royalty, nobility, and even luxury. Some call purple the favorite color of people with an eye for detail. Her occupation and leadership are exceptional. Paul engages her as a go-to person as he starts to

evangelize Europe, staying in her home. In sum, Paul shows leadership that speaks to evangelization today. He meets each community where it is at and with what it finds familiar.

The Gospel reminds the faithful that the presence of the Holy Spirit does not assure comfort. John warns of expulsion and even death as the price for following Christ. Jesus' passion includes guards dressing him in purple robes and mocking him (Mk 15:17; Mt 27:28). Indeed, the color purple takes on many meanings.

In the end, we know, the suffering of Our Lord's passion and death gives way to the glory of His resurrection, which we continue to celebrate during this Easter season.

My dear graduates, as you give thanks for the blessings received over the past four years and look with hope to the bright future that God has planned for you, I encourage you to strive to live a coherent life in a world that is often incoherent. Let people see your faith, your hope, and your love, not only in your words, but also in your actions and your deeds.

May God give us this grace. Amen.