

**Homily for the Baccalaureate Mass for Thomas Aquinas College
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Striving to Live a Coherent Life in an Era of Incoherence

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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 for the graduating class of Thomas Aquinas College. With gratitude for the many blessings that the Lord has bestowed upon these students over the past four 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. (One has only to stop making repairs around the house to see that!)”¹

The theme of my homily for this Baccalaureate Mass 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 *cohærere*, 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.

With regard to coherence as it relates specifically to the reception of Holy Communion, George Weigel, Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., called attention in an article in *First Things* to the use of the phrase “Eucharistic coherence” by the Latin American bishops in their 2007 Aparecida Document, in which they insisted on “Eucharistic coherence” in their Catholic communities.²

It should be noted that then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, played a crucial role in the development of the “Aparecida Document,” which was issued by the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean after the fifth general conference of CELAM.

The Bible is clear about Eucharistic coherence as stated by Saint Paul in his 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.

Since being appointed Bishop of Springfield in Illinois in 2010, I have been asked many times about the question of Holy Communion for pro-abortion politicians in light of canon 915 of the Catholic Church's *Code of Canon Law*, which states that those "who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to Holy Communion." In our 2004 Statement on Catholics in Political Life, the Bishops of the United States said, "Failing

to protect the lives of innocent and defenseless members of the human race is to sin against justice. Those who formulate law therefore have an obligation in conscience to work toward correcting morally defective laws, lest they be guilty of cooperating in evil and in sinning against the common good.”

As Bishop of the Capital of the State of Illinois, I have had to deal with several Catholic legislators in the Illinois General Assembly who obstinately persisted in promoting the abominable crime and very grave sin of abortion by facilitating the passage of and/or voting for the Act Concerning Abortion of 2017, which among other things, provides for taxpayer funding of abortion, as well as for the Reproductive Health Act of 2019, which, among other things, purports to declare abortion to be a fundamental right, while also declaring that an unborn baby does not have independent rights under the laws of this state.

On June 2, 2019, I issued a “Decree Declaring that Illinois Legislative Leaders who Promoted and Voted for the Act Concerning Abortion of 2017 (House Bill 40) and the Reproductive Health Act of 2019 (Senate Bill 25) Are Not to be Admitted To Receive Holy Communion, and Catholic Legislators

who Voted for Pro-Abortion Legislation Are Not to Present Themselves for Holy Communion per Canons 915 and 916 of the *Code of Canon Law*.”³

Along these lines, I was grateful to see the Pastoral Letter of San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone issued on May 1st entitled, “Before I Formed You in the Womb, I Knew You: A Pastoral Letter on the Human Dignity of the Unborn, Holy Communion, and Catholics in Public Life.”⁴

Also, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine and the Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance (on which I serve as a member) are preparing a document on Eucharistic coherence at the direction of USCCB President José Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the forces of Evil are already conspiring to derail and block the drafting and publication of this much-needed document. Please pray for Our Lady, Mother of the Church, and Saint Joseph, Terror of Demons, to intercede along with Saint Michael the Archangel and all of our guardian angels to safeguard these efforts to protect the integrity of the Eucharist and promote respect for the innocent lives of unborn babies.

In his May 7, 2021, letter to the Catholic Bishops of the United States, Cardinal Luis Ladaria, S.J., Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote that “the Congregation advises that any statement of the Conference regarding Catholic political leaders would best be framed within the broad context of worthiness for the reception of Holy Communion on the part of all the faithful, rather than only one category of Catholics, reflecting their obligation to conform their lives to the entire Gospel of Jesus Christ as they prepare to receive the sacrament (Doctrinal Note art. 4). It would be misleading if such a statement were to give the impression that abortion and euthanasia alone constitute the only grave matters of Catholic moral and social teaching that demand the fullest level of accountability on the part of Catholics.”

In this regard, Cardinal Ladaria is absolute correct. For example, those who engage in homosexual activity should refrain from receiving Holy Communion until they repent and reform their lives.

Heterosexual couples who cohabit and engage in sexual relations outside of marriage should refrain from receiving Holy Communion until they repent and reform their lives.

Married persons who have divorced and remarried without having received a declaration of nullity of their previous marriage should not present themselves for Holy Communion unless they pledge to live as brother and sister and can do so without giving scandal.

Those who willfully miss Mass on Sundays without having been lawfully dispensed or excused for a good reason such as illness should refrain from Holy Communion until they repent, confess their sins, and receive sacramental absolution.

It must be emphasized that the denial of Holy Communion in such circumstances is a medicinal remedy that is intended not to punish, but to foster a change of heart and encourage the sinner to repent and live a moral life that is coherent with the Catholic faith.

Living a life that is coherent with the Catholic faith may make you the object of hatred and bring you scorn and ridicule. But Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms, in the words of today's Gospel passage from St. John, "If the world hates you, realize that it hated Me first. If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, and I have chosen you out of the world, the world hates you" (John 15:18-19).

Our reading today from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans reminds us that “God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

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. Be one in mind and holiness, for we are one through our communion in the sacred flesh of Christ, and through our sharing in the one Holy Spirit. Be one in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, (New York, N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1988), Chapter 7.

² George Weigel, "The Challenge of Eucharistic Coherence," *First Things*, February 3, 2021, accessed online at <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/02/the-challenge-of-eucharistic-coherence>.

³ "Bishop Paprocki: Illinois Catholic lawmakers who promoted or voted for extreme abortion legislation are not to receive Communion: Bishop's decree cites Canon 915 and 916 of the Code of Canon Law," News Release of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, June 6, 2019. Accessed online at <https://www.dio.org/communications/press-releases/bishop-paprocki-illinois-catholic-lawmakers-who-promoted-or-voted-for-extreme-abortion-legislation-are-not-to-receive-communion-decree-included.html>.

⁴⁴ Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, "Before I Formed You in the Womb, I Knew You: A Pastoral Letter on the Human Dignity of the Unborn, Holy Communion, and Catholics in Public Life," May 1, 2021, accessed online at <https://sfarchdiocese.org/inthewomb>.