

**BACCALAUREATE MASS
DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE
BISHOP BARRES' HOMILY
MASS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
ST. AGNES CATHEDRAL**

JUNE 13, 2020

Graduates from the Class of 2020 from our Catholic Elementary Schools and our Catholic High Schools as well as our Public Elementary Schools and our Public High Schools, our non-Catholic Private Schools and those who have Home-Schooled:

As we celebrate together this Baccalaureate Mass of the Holy Spirit, I wish to congratulate you, your parents and your families as you celebrate this milestone and these memories and as you assess and discern your future with the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

You yourselves, and the entire World, have been through so much since March. You have experienced the traumas and loss of lives in the COVID-19 crisis.

Your Catholic faith has given you and your families much strength and direction during these challenging times and you have been inspired by the heroism of so many medical personnel and first responders on the front lines. That will be a lifelong memory and inspirational point of reference for you.

You have also experienced the tragic killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, and the protests and calls for reform in our cities and our communities.

As Catholics living the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit, we are called to be Divine Mercy witnesses to racial justice, and social justice and change grounded in the sanctity of human life, non-violence, our own Spirit-driven

personal conversions and the heroic and courageous living of our Catholic faith.¹

We celebrate today with the Book of the Prophet Isaiah the Gifts of the Holy Spirit streaming through your lives – the Gifts of Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord.

During your preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation, you studied and prayed in depth these Gifts of the Holy Spirit. It makes sense to return to the Gifts at this Baccalaureate Mass since they are critical to discerning where the Holy Spirit will be leading you in life.

Let's take this opportunity to expand our appreciation and openness to these Seven Gifts.

In his 2014 Catecheses on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in St. Peter's Square, Pope Francis said that the Holy Spirit's Gift of Wisdom gives us the grace "to see everything with the eyes of God...to see the world, to see situations, circumstances, problems, everything through God's eyes...we must ask the Lord to grant us the Holy Spirit and to grant us the gift of wisdom that wisdom of God that teaches us to see with God's eyes, to feel with God's heart, to speak with God's words."²

Pope Francis says that the Holy Spirit's Gift of Understanding "is a grace which only the Holy Spirit can infuse and which awakens in a Christian the ability to go beyond the outward appearance of reality and to probe the depths of the thoughts of God and his plan of salvation."³ The Gift of Understanding helps us to see all things with supernatural vision and helps us to penetrate and live the truths of Sacred Scripture, the Creed, the Sacraments, Catholic Moral Teaching and Prayer with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

¹See Bishop John O. Barres' April 2018 Pastoral Letter, *The Dream and Our Deepest, Truest Selves: Commemorating the Life and Mission of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the 50th Anniversary of his Assassination*, available on the Diocese of Rockville Centre website, DRVC.org.

² Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter's Square, April 9, 2014.

³ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter's Square, April 30, 2014.

Pope Francis says that the Holy Spirit's Gift of Counsel "is the gift through which the Holy Spirit enables our conscience to make a concrete choice in communion with God, according to the logic of Jesus and his Gospel."⁴ The Gift of Counsel helps us to know God's will, to have a strong discerning conscience formed in the Splendor of Truth of the Catholic Church's moral teaching and to discern the paths in life that give God Glory and advance the salvation of souls.

Pope Francis says that the Holy Spirit's Gift of Fortitude "liberates the soil of our heart, frees it from sluggishness, from uncertainty and from all the fears that can hinder it, so that the Lord's Word may be put into practice authentically and with joy...The Apostle Paul said something that will benefit us to hear: 'I can do all things in him who strengthen me.' (Phil 4:13) When we face daily life, when difficulties arise, let us remember this: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.'"⁵ Fortitude gives our souls strength and courage to overcome pride, sin and temptation and to embrace our baptismal call to holiness and a bold and creative missionary spirit.

Pope Francis says that the Holy Spirit's Gift of Knowledge "comes from the Holy Spirit (and) is not limited to human knowledge; it leads us to grasp, through creation, the greatness and love of God and his profound relationship with every creature. When our eyes are illumined by the Spirit, they open to contemplate God, in the beauty of nature and in the grandeur of the cosmos, and they lead us to discover how everything speaks to us about Him and His love."⁶ The Gift of Knowledge helps us to understand that everything comes from God and is directed toward God and gives us the motivation to study our Catholic faith, express our Catholic faith and live our Catholic faith in the World.

⁴ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter's Square, May 7, 2014.

⁵ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter's Square, May 14, 2014.

⁶ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter's Square, May 21, 2014.

Pope Francis says that the Holy Spirit’s Gift of Piety “stirs in us above all gratitude and praise. This is, in fact, the reason and the most authentic meaning of our worship and our adoration. When the Holy Spirit allows us to perceive the presence of the Lord and all his love for us, it warms the heart and moves us quite naturally to prayer and celebration. Piety, therefore, is synonymous with the genuine religious spirit, with filial trust in God, with that capacity to pray to him with the love and simplicity that belongs to those who are humble of heart.”⁷

Pope Francis says that the Holy Spirit’s Gift of Fear of the Lord “does not mean being afraid of God; we know well that, God is Father, that he loves us and wants our salvation, and he always forgives, always; thus, there is no reason to be scared of him! Fear of the Lord, instead, is the gift of the Holy Spirit through whom we are reminded of how small we are before God and of his love and that our good lies in humble, respectful and trusting self-abandonment into his hands. This is the fear of the Lord: abandonment in the goodness of our Father who loves us so much.”⁸ The Gift of Fear helps us keep the Face of God in the Holy Trinity rather than our own egos at the center of our lives, focus and destiny.

Class of 2020, as you prepare for a new transition in your life, pray frequently the short but powerful prayer: “Come Holy Spirit!” “Come Holy Spirit!” “Come Holy Spirit!” Allow the Holy Spirit to lead, guide and strengthen you. And give the Holy Spirit free reign to express the Spirit’s Seven Gifts in your life.

Today at this Baccalaureate Mass, together, we shout from the rooftops of Long Island and the rooftops of the World: “Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth!”

As your Bishop, I want to congratulate you on your graduation. I want to thank your parents, your families, your principals, your pastors, priests and deacons, your chaplains, your teachers and all who have mentored, encouraged, challenged and supported you.

⁷Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter’s Square, June 4, 2014.

⁸ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, St. Peter’s Square, June 11, 2014.

Your growth as a missionary disciple, your ever-expanding friendship with Christ, your rock-solid commitment to your Catholic faith spiritually, emotionally and intellectually, your discernment with the Holy Spirit of your own unique educational, career and vocational path in service to the mission of the Church to the World is a great inspiration to your family, your friends and to everyone you will be meeting as you take your next steps to a High School, a University or the world of work.

Know that you and your families are all daily in my prayers and Masses.

I would like to say a special word to our graduating High School Seniors, but words that also apply to graduating 8th graders and to all our families.

Graduating High School Seniors, as you move on to the next phase of your life, you have an important existential decision to make.

Will you be faithful to the Sunday Mass?

I ask that you make that decision and commitment now.

Radical fidelity to the Sunday Mass and the Body and Blood of Christ throughout the course of your life helps keep you centered in Christ and his will for your life, faithful to the Splendor of Truth of Catholic moral teaching, and deeply receptive to the Holy Spirit's guidance for your unique mission in the Church and service to the World.

JRR Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings* and a passionate Catholic, once wrote these words: "I put before you the one great thing to love on earth, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. There you will find true romance, true honor, true glory and the true ways of all your loves upon earth."

Class of 2020: May the Word of God be a light and lamp for your steps through life (Psalm 119) and may the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ be the true way of all your loves upon earth. God bless you!