

June 14, 2020

Class of 2020:

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

You celebrate your graduation as the Catholic Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. As your Bishop and Servant, I would like to offer you some brief advice and counsel grounded in your love for the Catholic Mass and the Eucharist.

1)First, be radically faithful to the Sunday Mass every week of your life till the week of your death. As you digitally plan your week, make your presence at the Sunday Mass the top priority of your week. Make that decision right now. The Mass keeps you anchored, focused and directed on the mind, heart and life of Jesus. Live the rhythm of the Sunday Mass in your daily life. Remember with St. Ephrem that when we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, we eat and drink *Fire and Spirit*.

2)Pray daily. Carry a small copy of the New Testament everywhere you go or keep it close by on your I-phone. Read, meditate, pray, contemplate and live the inspired Word of God. Set aside 15 minutes a day to pray in silence. Listen to Father, Son and Holy Spirit streaming through and illuminating your soul. In a social media addicted world, listen deeply to God in silence and listen deeply to others with the Face, Eyes, Ears, Empathy, Concentration and Compassion of Jesus Christ. Listening daily to God in silence is the best investment to discerning your educational, career and vocational path.

3)Embrace and live the Ten Commandments given to us by God. Reject Moral Relativism – the belief that there is no right or wrong and the dysfunctional separation of freedom from truth. Reject Moral Relativism’s mirage-like paths of self-destruction. Realize that true freedom means to form our consciences and actions with the truths of Jesus Christ that set us free. Embrace the objective Splendor of Truth of the Sacred Scriptures, the Creed,

the Sacraments, Catholic Moral Teaching, and the Catholic Saints and Mystics teaching on prayer. Make frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance and experience Christ's mercy and forgiveness consistently. Become a courageous forgiver and instrument of the Divine Mercy of Jesus Christ in the World.

4)Have a deep devotion to the Holy Spirit. Say the prayer "Come Holy Spirit!" many times each day. Allow the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit – Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord – to have free reign in your life. Dedicate your educational path, your career path and your vocational path to the Holy Spirit. Have a burning daily desire for Heaven and Eternal Life. Realize that the people who are most productive in their life on earth are precisely those who have the long view, those who have a burning desire for Heaven. (C.S. Lewis)

5)Be an instrument of Catholic Social Justice, Racial Justice and Harmony, and Social Change that is grounded in the sanctity of human life, the non-violence expressed in history by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King¹, and your commitment to daily conversion and holiness, and a creative Catholic missionary spirit. Remember the lessons of history that violence and a spirit of destruction set back authentic movements of social change by decades. Carry the Cross of Jesus Christ courageously on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, the ignored, the forgotten, the victims of discrimination and racial injustice.

6)Remember throughout your lives your experience of the traumas and loss of lives in the COVID-19 crisis. We pray for their souls and their families today. 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. Their example will be a lifelong memory and inspirational point of reference for you for your entire life. Live their spirit of Fortitude, Courage, Sacrifice and Magnanimity.

¹ See 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.

7)Finally, go to your Mother Mary, Our Lady Queen of Peace, Mother of the Church, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Our Lady of Guadalupe. Pray decades of the Rosary each day. Take her advice at the Wedding of Cana: “Do whatever my Son Jesus tells you to do.”

Class of 2020: I congratulate you, your parents and your families as you celebrate this milestone and these memories and as you commit your future to the Holy Spirit. Be not afraid! Remember with St. Paul that eyes have not seen and ears have not heard what God has prepared for those who love Him. God Bless you!