

Baccalaureate Mass at St. Mary's High School, Annapolis

Introduction: At Commencement

Father Tizio and Brother Priests, Dr. Morgan, Mr. Reinhart, members of the faculty, honored guests, dear parents and grandparents, and today, especially, dear graduates:

It is a joy for me to celebrate this Baccalaureate Mass with and for you in this special place which has become for you a second home, and which now sends you forth into the world.

You are the Salt of the Earth! You are the Light of the World!

These are days rich with excitement. It is a time for celebration and thanksgiving. You are full of potential. Here you have learned so much. The friendships you have forged here will accompany you for a lifetime.

I'm sure you know that, just a few weeks ago in Rome, Pope Francis canonized Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. I was privileged to witness it personally. Both of these great Popes and, in a particular way, Saint John Paul II, had a great love for young people.

Sociologists tell us that in 1995 perhaps the largest crowd in human history gathered around St. John Paul II in Manila, in the Phillipines, for World Youth Day. At another World Youth Day, held in Toronto in 2002, the theme of that enormous gathering with the Pope was taken from the same Gospel passage which *you* have chosen for today's Mass: "*You are the salt of the earth! You are the light of the world!*" (Mt 5:13-14)

You Want to be Great

Whatever your plans are for next year, and wherever your travels will take you, all of you have at least this in common: your families are immensely proud of you, and love you very much. They have the highest hopes for you! And all of you, deep down, want to be happy, and want to make a difference in this world. You want to be great,

and your family, and friends, and I want you to be great too!

And, most importantly, so does God! Just a moment ago, we heard the words of the Prophet Jeremiah, through whom God said, “I know well the plans I have in mind for you— plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.”

Indeed, for all of you, the future *is* full of hope. But make no mistake, there are forces in our culture and in the world which would rob that hope from you. Don't let them. St. John Paul II once put it this way. He said, “Dear young people, do not be content with anything less than the highest ideals! Do not let yourselves be discouraged by those who are disillusioned with life and have grown deaf to the deepest and most authentic desires of their heart. You are right to be disappointed with hollow entertainment and passing fads, and with aiming at too little in life.”

I can do All Things in Christ who Strengthens Me

My friends, there is so much goodness in the world. So much potential, so many opportunities. But there's also a lot of sadness, a lot of broken relationships, a lot of aimlessness, almost a kind of amnesia about who we really are. And who we really are, of course, is sons and daughters of the living God, whom he intends to live eternally with him.

Put another way, a person of great wisdom once said, “If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.” So of all the lessons you've learned here, I hope the one which resonates within you most deeply is the truth that you have been created by God, that God has called you to know and love him, and that the ultimate destiny of every person is to know the never-ending love of God in eternity.

Pope Benedict once said, “We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”

So what is the difference between the aimlessness of not knowing where you're going, and the future full of hope which God intends for you? The difference is Christ. He is the way, and the truth, and the life. He is the one who brings order and

purpose out of the chaos and confusion of sin. He is the one who came to earth to save us. He is the one who gives us the strength and hope to stake our lives on Him, and in Him, to discover who we really are. As St. Paul said in our second reading today, "I can do all things in Christ, who strengthens me."

Salt of the Earth and Light of the World

Finally, my friends, You are the salt of the earth! You are the light of the world! Salt is used not only to give flavor, but also to preserve and keep. When people's lives sometimes become flat and dull because they have forgotten about Christ, it is your privilege and responsibility to bring Christ, and his light, even to the dark corners of the world. The flame of a single candle dispels the gloom of darkness. Christ is counting on you to bring him into the world, so that the world may have life.

Conclusion - Hail Mary

Let me leave you with this. This month of May is one of the most beautiful months of the year. It is also the month of Our Lady, the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the patroness of this parish, of this high school, and of the entire Archdiocese of Baltimore.

Mary is praying for you today. She is the best of Mothers. She is Christ's mother, and she is our mother too. So at this Baccalaureate Mass, we could do nothing more practical or helpful than to entrust you, and your families, and your futures, to the never-failing intercession of Our Lady. So let's pray together: Hail Mary ...

Congratulations to all of you, and may God bless you, and keep you always in His love!