

# Catholic Schools Convocation: Mass of the Holy Spirit

## Introduction

Well, here we are again, gathered for the Catholic Schools Convocation. Gracing us with their presence is Bishop Madden, a true friend of our schools, together with priests and religious women and men who lead and support Catholic schools in so many ways. I am delighted to greet Dr. Edmondson, the Superintendent of Catholic Schools, and Mr. Jim Sellinger, the Chancellor of Catholic Education, as well as representatives of the Catholic Schools Office, together with so many administrators, principals, and educators. This is my opportunity to thank you for educating and forming our young people in the ways of faith, virtue, knowledge, and service. With us today are many educators who have served in our schools for years; how warmly we welcome you back! And we are joined today by many of you who will be teaching and serving in our schools for the first time: how welcome you are! Worshipping with us today are members of the Archdiocesan school board and other school board members – thank you for your service – And we are especially happy that some of our students are with us. You are our pride and our joy – thanks for being here.

Gathered together as we are this morning, we are perhaps a bit larger than the audience Jesus encountered in his hometown synagogue at Nazareth. Nonetheless, Jesus steps into our midst, and using the words of Isaiah the Prophet, he announces to us what he announced to them: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, & to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord...”*

Dare I sum up Jesus’ message in three little words: healing, hope, and gladness. This is not a message which Jesus delivered dispassionately. Knowing he would face an incredulous audience among his relatives and kinsman, he nonetheless proclaimed that he is the very embodiment, the ultimate fulfillment of that divine message of healing, hope, and gladness– the deepest longing of every human heart, including

the young people we serve.

Please God, Jesus has not met an incredulous audience here this morning. Rather, we have gathered as a family of faith to invoke the Holy Spirit upon ourselves, our students, and their families, so that we could truly open our hearts to Jesus' message of healing, hope, and joy and be the Lord's instruments in imparting this message to our young people during this acceptable year, this new academic year, that lies before us. So with the help of the Holy Spirit let us reflect on Jesus' message to us and to those we strive to serve in his Name.

## **Healing**

Let me speak of healing: the Lord's ministry was all about healing. As we read the Gospels and take them to heart, we see how much time Jesus devoted to curing and restoring people. Again and again Jesus healed the sick, the lame, and the blind, but more than that, he was sent "to heal the brokenhearted".

Through her ministries, the Church continues the Lord's work of healing. Pope Francis called the Church "a field hospital" where the deepest wounds of human existence can find healing. Almost every day you are called to participate in that ministry of healing. It ranges from taking care of a minor playground injury to comforting a child who has lost a parent or a loved one. Sometimes you serve young people who face rejection or children who bear unbelievable burdens at home. Many of you educate in this City of Baltimore, a community which stands in need of healing, in so many homes and so many neighborhoods. Our students come to us for safety, for a warm meal, for love and security, for the opportunity to end the cycle of poverty and violence.

To our students we offer a message of healing, principally by introducing them to the Person of Christ, who came "to heal the broken hearted" – and, above all, by our personal readiness to seek and find in the Lord healing for wounds of our existence – for our fears, our hurts, our sins. One of life's primary lessons is the importance of admitting our need for healing and allowing the Lord's grace to bind up and heal our wounds.

## **Ministry of Hope**

The Lord also brings us a message of hope. To those who are captives, he promises

liberty. To those who are blind, he promises sight. To those who are oppressed, he promises freedom.

Jesus is not merely promising us or the young people we serve an earthly paradise. He is not promising us a life of ease, a trouble-free life. Rather the Lord is setting our sights on the world to come when we will be set free from the captivity of sin; when our eyes will be fully opened to the vision of God; when the oppression of hatred and evil will give way to the freedom to embrace the good and to love as we have been loved.

What's more, Jesus is telling us that this new life begins now. It is not a pipedream way off in the future but a hope that begins to be fulfilled here and now, in our daily lives. Yet for so many people, it seems, their horizon of hope does not extend that far. For some it's the next mortgage payment. For others it's gritty determination that their child will be wildly successful. I once asked a 6th grade class to tell me their hopes for the future. One young person put up her hand and said, "My parents want me to be a CEO." No pressure there!

We truly want our young people to succeed and you labor mightily every day—at great personal sacrifice—to help them acquire the knowledge and skills that will help them fulfill their potential and become productive members of society. But we don't stop there; we educate the whole child – body, mind, and spirit. We seek to be catalysts in bringing about in them that moral transformation and growth in virtue by which all of us show we are longing for the peace of God's kingdom so deeply that we want to introduce it right now in the broken world where we live and work. Pope Benedict said that those who have hope live differently. We want to help our young people and their families to live differently, that is, to live in this passing world with their hearts set on the world to come.

## **Joy**

Finally, a word about joy: After all, Jesus came to bring "glad tidings to the poor" and was himself anointed with the Holy Spirit, the oil of gladness. Many of the young people we serve were anointed with the oil of gladness when they were anointed and again when they were confirmed. Their minds and hearts are touched with a joy that comes from above.

That is why our Catholic schools are places of joy. There is joy in discovering and caring for the wonders of creation. There is joy in unlocking human potential. There is joy in opening for young people the treasury of knowledge and wisdom. There is joy in becoming aware of the depth and beauty of God's love for us. Joy is a sure sign of discipleship and a sure sign of growth in sanctity. It doesn't mean we're problem-free. What it does mean is that nothing extinguishes the joy of following the Lord. Joy, after all, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit; thank you for being ministers of joy.

## **Conclusion**

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us, may we be agents of the Lord's healing, hope, and joy to the students and families we are privileged to serve. When this academic year has run its course, may we have the consolation of knowing that we have touched the lives of our students with that same love with which we have been loved.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!