

Baccalaureate Mass 2005, Homily by Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.

Posted 3 June 2005

It is serendipitous to celebrate this Baccalaureate Mass on the feast of Corpus Christi, the feast of the body and blood of the Lord. In the church's calendar, today is for celebrating the real presence of Christ among us. Today the Church wants to emphasize and appreciate the presence of Christ in our lives in the Eucharist. And today, in Scranton, we also want to celebrate the presence of Christ in our lives at this University. Corpus Christi is one of the great feasts in the liturgical year. The 19th century Jesuit poet Gerard Manly Hopkins compared today's celebration to other feasts and said, "Christmas, Easter and Holy Thursday are only anniversaries or commemorations, but Corpus Christi is the feast of the Real Presence, therefore it is the most purely joyous of solemnities." How good for us then to gather on this feast one last time around God's table to give thanks for all that God has done here in Scranton, for how real God's presence has been revealed to us for pure joy. So some things need to be said today about what you might remember of God's presence during these years in your lives, and how these memories can stand you in good stead as you face the future. I want to say some things about voices-Scranton voices. Scranton sounds. I want to say some things about dreams and visions. And lastly, I want to say some things about the gospel's fix on your post-baccalaureate future.

First about sounds and voices and how Christ is really present in them. Some are more important than others. Think of those you can identify in an instant. For those of a certain age it might be Sinatra or Springsteen-voices so unique you'd never know they are both from New Jersey. In every generation certain people sing and we immediately recognize the sound. Now think of the songs and sounds you've come to recognize at Scranton. A train whistle, the splash of oars on the Susquehanna at six a.m., a train whistle, your roommate moaning on a Monday morning impervious to the alarm, a train whistle, Professors pushing and prodding you to explore new paradigms to discover new worlds in the words of old poets, to appreciate an elegant equation or try the truth of a theory, to discover the dearest freshness deep down things, afternoon and evening voices, gossip on the Gunster Patio, coaches calling across Fitzpatrick field, Cheryl Boga banging out the rhythm of a complicated chorus, the roar you made in the Long Center in March cheering the Lady Royals on to the final four, the din of Oscars on a Thursday night, the toll of a bell calling you to Mass, the quiet that covered the campus in winter along with the falling snow and the falling snow and the falling snow. This place is surely "full of noises, sounds and sweet airs that give delight....voices that make you dream and which remembered in future years will make you cry to dream again."

All of the Scranton voices, these Scranton sounds, have shaped your dreams and informed your vision in ways you can only discover in the days to come. Listen to them and you'll be heeding the words of Moses in today's first reading. "Remember and do not forget," Moses says. Remember how here at Scranton God directed your journeying, how God guided you and brought you forth. Moses talks about tests, and here you've experienced those as well: tests of the liberal kind at semester's end, but there are also some spiritual, some social, some athletic, some artistic. You've passed through all of them and stand here now on the eve of your commencement.

If you're honest, you'll also admit that you stand here on a lot of shoulders: the shoulders of one first rate faculty and especially on the shoulders of your first, best teachers, your parents, your families of the many voices you can remember. Cherish them, their advice, their wisdom, their warnings, their challenges, and their selfless expression of love that made your time at Scranton possible. Remember and do not forget how Christ has been present to you through them.

Our second reading calls us to remember how we are united in God's grace, how we can be one body in the Lord. And for us at Scranton that unity, that closeness is more than a dream. It is, thank God, our reality. I have studied and taught at many universities, but there is something rare and precious about this place. As I have heard Father Florio say in many homilies, outsiders just don't get it. The "it" is hard to define, but it has everything to do with the human dimension of this University. Commitment to community is more than a rhetorical flourish. It colors all that happens here and you have made that happen. Please take that commitment with you wherever you go. Take Scranton with you. Always view the world and your place in it from the Scranton perspective: never compromise your commitment to community. Our fractured world needs women and men formed as you have been in Scranton, women and men for others. This week has been filled with Celebrations. On the surface of things, we have been celebrating your graduation. But deep down things we have been celebrating Scranton -- its past and its promise. As of tomorrow, you are part of the University's past. For the rest of your lives you are part of its promise. As a Catholic and Jesuit University, Scranton has made a promise to the world-a promise to help and save it, heal it, unify it. The degree you receive tomorrow is more than a testimony to your talents. It is a license to love and serve. All that you have heard- all that you have seen here has been leading up to this-a promise to lay down your lives for your friends, a promise to love.

In order to keep this promise, as our Gospel reminds us, you will need the presence of God in your lives. That presence, as you know well, can be mediated through people. "Christ plays in ten thousand places," a Jesuit poet writes, looking in eyes, looking in limbs, and his to the Father." Through the features of men's faces. Christ has surely played for you here, so you recognize him in the future. Recognize him in prayers as well and especially in the Eucharist. Our late Pope, John Paul II, put it this way: "Have no fear of moving into the unknown. Simply step out fearlessly knowing that Christ is with you. Therefore, no harm can befall you: all is very well. When you wonder about the mystery of yourself, look to Christ who gives you the meaning of life." Look to Christ in them, in prayer, and especially in Corpus Christi, the body and blood of the Lord and know always that you are in our prayers in Scranton, especially when the University gathers for Mass. You will come back often, I hope, over the next six decades. You'll wander around, look for landmarks, find new buildings where you left old ones, marvel at how the campus changes. But there is one part of Scranton that will not have changed, one gathering of this community that will welcome you as fully, as richly, as you are welcome on this special weekend. Each Mass will find you here and tell you again "that the end of all our exploring is to arrive where you started, and know this place for the first time." Long after those who taught you are gathered into dust, and quite independently of the rise and fall of bricks and mortar, this Mass is a promise that in every Mass you will always be here.