

Mass of the Holy Spirit, August 28, 2008 -- Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.

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"Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live." You may have noticed these words being engraved above the entrance to the DeNaples Center at the top of our new Dionne Green. They are from a poem written by the 16th century English Jesuit martyr and saint, Robert Southwell. As a result of religious persecution, Southwell spent much of his life in exile before he returned home to England to lay down his life for his faith, his friends and his family – for who, what and where he loved. "Not where I breathe, but where I love I live."

These words are testimony to the love that binds us together as a unique community at The University of Scranton: because of that love we can know the fullness of life that is promised us by Christ. At the start of a new academic year, it is well for us, I believe, to ponder anew our love so as to recommit ourselves to the University's sacred mission. So let me put the question to us all: what do we love here?, what should we love here?

Today's readings suggest some answers, I think: we should love wisdom, one another, the world and God.

The first reading from Isaiah speaks of wisdom as a gift or outgrowth of the Holy Spirit whose help we call down today. Wisdom is the heart of the matter for us as a University community. It's what we pursue through teaching and learning, scholarship and research. And let me distinguish wisdom from information by referencing a favorite scene from a favorite movie... "What do you want, wisdom or information?" Now neither I nor the movie mean to discredit information. It is useful and necessary, and I hope students acquire lots of it here. But wisdom is of a higher order and requires more of us in its pursuit. Wisdom wants us to go deep down things where the dearest freshness lies. And the way means rigorous intellectual work and an unwillingness to settle for the obvious, the quick fix or the easy answer. Let me give you a quick example of the latter – settling for the easy answer – and why it's the opposite of wisdom. This summer I spent some time at my family's beloved house at the Jersey shore. Fr. Devino joined me for a couple days. One night my parents wanted to watch the dreaded "Dancing with the Stars," so Fr. Devino and I fled to the family room on the second floor while my parents stayed downstairs. As Terry and I were solving all the world's problems as only a couple of Jesuits can do, a dramatic storm started – thunder, lightning, the whole deal. I predicted we'd lose power, a common phenomenon during storms at the shore. With that the lights went out. So we sat in the dark talking for a couple of hours. The next morning over coffee with my parents, Terry commented on the power loss. My parents looked confused and then bemused until my father said, "We didn't lose power. The lights upstairs are on a timer." Fr. Devino had settled for the obvious, for the quick fix, the easy answer. Like two fools we sat in the dark without ever considering an alternative explanation or even looking out the window to see the rest of the neighborhood lit up like Christmas. That's the opposite of wisdom. Wisdom which we ought to love and pursue here requires open minds and nimble imagination. Those qualities are the stuff that God's Holy Spirit can provide.

Today's second reading suggests that we ought to love one another for unity's sake. It speaks of this in terms of our "call," our vocation. And it's specific in spelling out the requirements of such love. It's realistic, too. Saint Paul was no romantic. He anticipated Dostoyevsky's truth "Love in action is harsh and dreadful compared to love in dreams." Paul knew that love requires "humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another lovingly." That might sound easy enough at the start of a semester when we all return tanned, rested and ready. But it might not seem so some months from now when it gets dark early, the snow starts to fall and papers are due and need to be graded. That's when loving one another will require the Holy Spirit's help. Such real love, too, which is the source of our unity, doesn't erase differences for the sake of uniformity or sameness. Real love at The University of Scranton recognizes and celebrates our diversity. That is especially true at a Jesuit institution where we strive to practice Cura Personalis. And don't let anyone tell you that means the education of the whole person. The ancient Greeks believed in that long before Ignatius Loyola came along. Ignatius experienced God dealing with him as a unique individual with a specific set of hopes and dreams, qualities and limitations. God loved him precisely as Ignatius Loyola – and that's how we should love one another in the spirit of Cura Personalis here at Scranton: a community of unique individuals each contributing in his or her own way to the University's mission. Such love for one another is the stuff of God's Holy Spirit.

Today's gospel speaks of loving our world and our God. And our love for both can be university-specific. In relationship to the world and its current reality, our role as a university is two-fold. The world is ours to understand and to serve—serve not in the sense of chasing power, privilege and prestige. At The University of Scranton we serve the world by seeking to make it more gentle and just. To do so, we must use all of our intellectual resources to read the signs of the times and react accordingly. We already do this in so many ways: the Leahy Clinic, Community Outreach, ISP, civic engagement. And at the start of a new academic year we should ask for the Holy Spirit's help to grasp what love will require of us as we look ahead. With the Spirit grounding us as we stand with one foot on the solid ground of our 120-year long past, and the other raised, ready to step into the future.

And, as always, at this Catholic university, we start the new year in the context of love for God, the God who calls us into being and sustains us in all we do. As a university our love for God inspires us to celebrate the life of the mind, one of God's greatest gifts. Through its exercise we live out Loyola's instruction to seek and find God in all things.

"Not where I breathe, but where I love, I live." My friends, as we begin this academic year, may the Holy Spirit hover over this good ground inspiring us to love and live well for the greater glory of God and the wellbeing of human kind. God bless you. God bless The University of Scranton.