

Homily - Mass for the Opening of the Academic Year 2006/2007

September 1, 2006

Feast of St. James, Apostle

Readings:

I Cor. 1:17-25

[Ps. 33:1-2, 4-5, 10-11]

Mt. 25:1-13

The Ordo for our worship begins this month with these words,

On a convenient weekday in September it is customary to celebrate a Mass of the Holy Spirit to mark the opening of the Academic Year.

Thus our plan and purpose for this morning is explained. We are gathered to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit upon our efforts and endeavours during this coming academic year.

As we place ourselves in the context of worship...as we dispose ourselves to the Word of Scripture...we hear words and a parable which speak of Wisdom.

Paul to the Corinthians speaks of a paradoxical wisdom. A wisdom of God which is such that "the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." (I Cor. 1:25) The Gospel presents a parable where wisdom means being prepared for the unexpected, the uncertain, even the unknown.

There is a hymn to Wisdom which is based on the ninth chapter of the Book of Proverbs. It says:

**Wisdom has built herself a house.
She has prepared a table
has brought forth her wine.
And she calls to her children
come and eat of my meat
and drink of my wine.
Come to the feast I have prepared for you.**

At institutions where I studied in my youth this hymn to Wisdom was sung on occasions such as this. The image of the school as the Banquet of Wisdom...the image of the academic year as a Feast of Wisdom is one which has intrigued me. I offer that image to you for your consideration today.

Being oriented and aware of the practical challenges before you may cause you to think of a Banquet of Wisdom as a high and distant goal. But as you start out on this new academic year I invite you to think of your classes, each lesson you plan, as in some way a Banquet of Wisdom.

Now for our purposes we can think of wisdom as a fund, a reserve of knowledge, experience and good judgment. It is the first of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit whose guidance we invoke today. It is a gift of not just knowing the right thing but doing the right thing. In simple, practical, terms for you it means seeking to produce not just good students but good citizens.

This requires a deep and constant self-awareness on the part of each teacher. You must always be aware that for those young hearts and minds and personalities who are placed in your care, as your students, you are in many ways a model.

For your students you are a model of -

1. - Authority
2. - Value
3. - Faith
4. - Caring
5. - Wisdom.

You model these things in a way far deeper and far more immediate than the words or grammar of any language could even convey.

As you begin this new academic year, as you prepare to model so many good and important things for your students, and if you dare to think of your teaching as a share in the Banquet of Wisdom, I recommend to you three things.

- 1) Be patient.
- 2) Be persistent.

3) Be a peacemaker.

Be patient, first of all, with yourself. In the Rite of Blessing for this occasion teachers and students are mentioned together. There is a reason for that. The practice of teaching is also the practice of learning.

In teaching you come to learn. You learn about yourself. About your strengths and your weaknesses. You come to learn about what you know and what you do not know. Over time the gap between the two will diminish but in the process be patient with yourself as you teach and learn.

Be patient with your students. Allow for the differing rates at which they can take in and master what you are offering them. Be patient with your co-workers. Be patient with the challenges offered by the resources of your workplace. You will not have everything you need all the time. That is a challenge!

Remember, a challenge is not only an obstacle which demands effort, even sacrifice. A challenge is also the catalyst for initiative, creativity, even genius. Be patient, for in your adventure of teaching and learning, patience is a useful virtue.

Next, be persistent. You must be convinced that the work you do is important, necessary, even vital for the good and the future of our community and indeed our world.

In the course of your work you will encounter more than your share of discouragement. But nothing undermines a noble cause more than a short-term effort. The desire to see a noble task through to a fruitful completion is as old as the human spirit itself. May your efforts not be short term. Despite any discouragement which comes your way, remain convinced of the importance of your vocation as a teacher. Be persistent in your purpose.

Finally, be a peacemaker. The one common thread which seems to run through our world and our country is violence. War is the constant headline in world news today. The most barbaric and degrading acts of violence are the regular headlines in our local news these days. Where does it end? It must begin to end with you.

You must convey to your students that violence is unacceptable as a means to resolve conflict and misunderstanding. You must never cease to impress,

especially upon the young men, that violence is no measure of manhood. You must model peacemaking in word and in action...by what you say but especially by how you behave.

So as we enter this new academic year, we pray for the grace to be patient, to be persistent, to be peacemakers.

Wisdom has built herself a house. But that house is built of living stones. You are those living stones. Wisdom has prepared a banquet. You are invited to share in that banquet.

May you share that Banquet of Wisdom with all those whose lives you will touch and influence and mold in your classroom this year. The wisdom of God has begun a good work in each of you. May the grace of God bring it to a fruitful completion.

Welcome to this new Academic Year.

God bless you all.