



GEORGETOWN PREPARATORY SCHOOL  
BACCALAUREATE MASS  
24 MAY, 2024

*to bring good news to the afflicted...  
to bind up the brokenhearted...  
to proclaim liberty to captives...release to prisoners...  
to announce a year of favor from the Lord...*  
– Isaiah 61:1b-2a



Okay, a quick question for the Class of 2024: (raise your hands) how many of you remember the Mass of the Holy Spirit from your Freshman Year? I'll give you a hint: we celebrated that Mass on 9 September, 2020, and we did it on (ugh!) Zoom. Does anyone remember?

Well, okay, because I don't remember it either; I only know because I looked it up. And the most important thing I found was that those words from Isaiah, those words from our first reading, those were the core of the Gospel we heard that day – that scene from the Gospel of Luke where Jesus goes to the synagogue and unrolls the scroll and reads those words to the people of his hometown, Nazareth. And he tells them: *This day, these words are fulfilled in your presence.* And the people there –

his friends and neighbors, the people he grew up with – they won't believe him because they think they know Jesus, they think they know it all – they forgot how God works great marvels, even through very ordinary people (Luke 4:16-24).

Gentlemen, there's an old truism that you can't really get the Gospel – you can't really get the good news – until you accept the bad news. And the bad news is that you too will forget. You will forget Prep. I'm sorry, but it's true. You will.

Oh, I don't mean that you won't have pleasant memories; you most certainly will. You'll recall that day in your first year when we were playing the lacrosse championship and the baseball championship at the same time, and we all ran back and forth to catch both wins. And that evening last year when the baseball team arrived at the lacrosse championship with the cup. You'll recall Johnny Crowley serenading us at Prep idol. And Cole Remington shouting himself sick with that eternal Prep question: *Have you got that spirit?* And the first time you realized that Goap is really, really tall.

And you'll recall Fr. Sauter in Freshman English class, and the way Mr. Tangwe could ask with absolute politeness that you tuck in your shirt before he noticed it wasn't tucked in. And Dean Rod's face as you offered yet another explanation for your current misadventure. And getting your first decent grade in Dr. Ochs' AP US History. And the

way Frau McGinn could make you feel much smarter than you ever thought you were. And that funny way Dr. DeFeo would stop in midsentence when he had yet another idea. And hearing Ms. Nichols having a “quiet” discussion with her class, all the way across the Quad (and by the way, I want you to remember that Ms. Nichols, like all of us, is the *imago Dei*, so when you meet God someday, God might just sound exactly like Ms. Nichols.)

And you’ll recall how beautiful the campus is in spring and fall...and sledding on the golf course...and napping in the George...and Cabin John...and freshman football...and rushing the field. Your service trip. Kairos.

And I am glad you will have those wonderful memories. Truly glad. But you will forget Prep...we all will. And that is the hard truth. We forget because we are human, and we lose sight of the truly important stuff for the details, we lose the forest for the trees as they say.

And that is why the Gospel we just heard is so important to us, so apt. Because the apostles have been with Jesus for three years, and they’ve seen and heard everything he has done – the preaching, the cures, the miracles...driving out demons...healing lepers and cripples and blind people...forgiving sinful people...multiplying loaves...walking on water...raising the dead to life for heaven’s sake. And they sat with him

at supper and listened to his words: *This is my body, this is my blood.* And they saw him betrayed, and crucified. And they saw him back from the dead. And they heard him say: *Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you forgive are forgiven, and those you hold bound shall be bound, and Go out to all the world and tell the good news, baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and Behold, I am with you even to the end of the world!*

And what did they do with it all? They forget. *I'm going fishing*, Peter says. And the rest: *Can we go too?* They forget they had a job to do, a life to live – and what's more, they forget who gave it to them – and they go back to fishing.

And here's the funny thing: it's a perfect set up. They're out there fishing all night. Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. And then someone calls from the shore: *Guys, have you caught anything? Why don't you throw the net out to the right. No, the other right.* And you'd think they'd get it. They've seen this movie before. This is how it all started – when a stranger came and asked for a boat ride. Same boat. Same shore. And once again, more fish than they can possibly handle. And only then do they get it. *It's the Lord*, John says, and Peter dives right back in – he's so excited!

You know, if I were Jesus, I'd be pretty pissed – *I gave you a job! – I gave you a life! – Fishing, honestly? Fishing?* But that's not Jesus. No, he makes them breakfast. No thunder. No lightning. Just breakfast and a warm fire.

And then a walk on the beach with his best friend. And it's not about denials. It's not about *what the heck to do think you're doing?* It's a simple question, three times. *Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you really love me?* And it's not that Jesus doesn't know. It's to remind Peter. To remind Peter about the deepest truth about himself. That his relationship with Jesus is finally the only thing that matters. And that that relationship will be what gives Peter the strength to do what he finally really will do, what he really wants to do – to follow Jesus. Follow Jesus in life. Follow Jesus finally to the cross. Follow Jesus in giving God the glory.

My brothers, you will forget Prep. We all will. That's the hard truth. There will come days when it won't be AMDG, just AMDMe. When *competence, conscience, courage, and compassion* will be replaced with just trying to scrape by. When *men of faith, men for-and-with others* will seem like too much effort. When generosity won't have a prayer.

But I want you to remember this: God does not forget; that is the good news, that is the Gospel. God will never forget your generosity, your

friendship, your brotherhood. He won't forget the struggles or the joys. And when you need to be reminded, God will find ways to remind you if you will accept them. But not by pleasant memories. No, God will challenge you – challenge you just as much as you were challenged here. You'll run into someone who needs you – maybe someone on the street, or maybe someone much closer to home – a friend, a coworker, your brother or sister, your mom or your dad or your grandma...maybe your spouse, maybe your own son, your own daughter. God will invite you to look after someone exactly the way Jesus asked Peter to *look after my sheep*, not just once but three times, not occasionally but as much as he could, as much as *you* can. And it may take exactly everything you have, or maybe – probably – even a little more.

And this is what I'd ask, that you remember. That you remember what is true, what is honorable, what is just, what is pure, what is lovely, what is gracious, what is excellent, what is worthy of praise, and that you commit yourself to doing those things again. That you do what you have learned and received and heard and seen here.

And then you *will* remember – truly remember and remember truly – Prep. For you will remember deepest truth of who you are and the only thing that is finally important –what you love, and why God created you and brought you here four years ago, and now sends you forth: *to bring good news to the afflicted...to bind up the broken-hearted...to proclaim*

*liberty to captives...release to prisoners...to announce a year of favor  
from the Lord.*

Rev. James R. Van Dyke, S.J.

President



AMDG