# Baccalaureate Mass 2016

I want to speak directly to you, the Class of 2016. Your parents and families, the faculty, staff, and administration are welcome to listen.

I realize you are too young to be familiar with a popular television series from 1966 – 1973 when I was your age. I was your age once upon a time. It took place during what was then called the Cold War. It told the story of select secret agents, comprised of three women known as Charlie's angels. Because of the difficulty of the assigned missions, these agents belonged to a special group called the Impossible Missions Force. They risked their lives by accepting covert missions against dictators and other evil organizations.

Every episode began with the agents receiving their mission for that particular episode. It was contained in a tape recorder. Now, I realize that may draw a blank for you. Let's substitute the word tape-recorder with DVD or texting if that will help. Their instructions always began with the same formula. We use the same formula to begin Mass, "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Theirs started with the following: "Good morning," followed by the name of the agent for whom the mission was intended. Then came the situation that was always critical and dangerous. The message concluded with, "Your mission, should you decide to accept it," or words to that effect, followed by a brief explanation of the mission." The message ended with, "As always, should you or any of your I.M. Force be caught or killed, the Secretary will disavow any knowledge of your actions." They were on their own. The agents always accepted their mission despite the risks of being killed in action.

I always felt that a mission, which was dangerous and did not promise any public recognition, spoke to a desire, a longing, or a craving for a purpose in life that is worthy of our lives. This is true whether one is married or single, a priest or a religious, a young adult or a senior citizen.

T.S. Eliot observed that most people lived lives of quiet desperation. I interpret that to mean most people are desperately looking for a mission in life that is bigger than themselves, that is good and noble and just, that demands the very best from them, and to which they would gladly give their lives if needed. Some have rejected that call to mission, but you can hear it beckoning in people who complain, "I'm bored." "Oh, that there would be a mission worthy of my life." is the unspoken prayer of us all.

Well, I stand here with good news for the Class of 2016. I know you are excited, happy, and anxious to receive your diploma tomorrow and move on with your lives. Some of you may even be thinking at this very moment, "I can't wait to get out of here," and if you do, I understand completely. The image that expression brings to my mind is of horses at the starting gate before a big race commences. They are pawing the ground with their hooves, waiting for the bell to ring and the gates to fly open, so they can charge out and get on with the race they were bred to run.

I don't want you to hear this wrong, but the Church also can't wait for you to get out of here and on your way. However, the "here" I am talking about is every Mass you attend, including this Baccalaureate Mass. Why do I say that? You may recall from your theology classes that the English word Mass comes from when the Mass was said in Latin. The congregation wouldn't leave before the priest dismissed them with the words, "Ite missa est." "Go, the Mass is ended." The Latin word "missa," from which we get the English word Mass, comes from the Latin word "mittere," meaning to throw or hurl. The modern words, missile, and mission, come from the Latin "mittere." Think about that. When the Mass is ended, we are thrown, hurled, or shot into the world like a missile and on a mission or with a purpose.

And what might that be? To do the mission you were called to by the risen Christ when you were baptized. And what mission is that? It is to bring glad tidings to the poor, liberty to captives, sight to the blind, free the oppressed so that God's kingdom will come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In baptism, the Spirit of the Lord came upon you and made you participants in the divine life. That life is nourished in the Eucharist and strengthened in Confirmation. You have been given the privilege to participate in Christ's mission. All that is included when the priest says at the end of Mass, "Go forth," or "Go, and announce the good news," or "Go in peace."

And so, every week, we come to Mass to ask forgiveness during the penitential rite for those times when we let the world change us rather than conforming it to Gospel values. Then we receive our instructions during the Liturgy of the Word about how to undertake this mission whether married or single, a priest or a religious, a young adult or a senior citizen. Then we are strengthened for the task in holy Communion and finally hurled back into the world at the end of Mass. You see, the call to mission is what you are meant to hear when the priest dismisses you by saying, "Go forth," or "Go, and announce the good news," or "Go in peace."

I said I had good news for you, Class of 2016, and there it is. You have a mission in life that is bigger than yourselves, that is good and noble and just, that demands the very best from you, and that is an answer to the prayer, "Oh, that there would be a mission worthy of my life."

The celebrant dismisses us at the end of Mass, saying, "The Mass is ended; go in peace to love and serve the Lord." Those words are like the bell that rings when the gates swing open, and the horses charge onto the racetrack. Those words are intended to launch us into the world like a missile that has as its target those forces arrayed against the coming of God's kingdom where God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven."

That is our mission. It gives us clarity and purpose, which is a gift from God. I say that because we are spared the pain and agony of those who question their life's purpose or meaning. In baptism, we are called by Christ to think, judge, feel, and act like him in all things. As Marists, we are to think, judge, feel, and act toward him as does Mary, his mother, and our mother in faith. We begin there and trust that things will become clearer as we grow in faith with the passage of time. That is the triune God's gift to us.

In response to this gift, the church concludes by saying, "Thanks be to God." That is meant to be said not half-heartedly, but whole-heartedly, not casually or nonchalantly, but with conviction, enthusiasm, and gratitude.

With those words, Class of 2016, the Church and Marist School sends you or, better, hurls you into the world to claim it for Christ. You do not go alone. Remember, these words of Our Lord, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. Those who love me, will keep my word; and my Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with them" (John 14: 18, 23).

That is why the Church and Marist School sends you on your way, to go in peace to love and serve the Lord.