Class Mass for Seniors
October 14, 2022

Do Whatever He Tells You!

Good morning,

It is a pleasure to be with the senior class of 2023. I suspect you are up to your eyeballs with classwork and extracurricular activities. Some of you may have jobs, and all of you are busy meeting the deadlines for applying to colleges.

That reminds me. You and your parents will receive a letter from me in early December. In it, I try to help seniors and their parents cope with the disappointment of not being accepted by their preferred college. It also is meant to give a perspective on how to receive the good news of being accepted into the school of your choice. The Counseling department asked me to help seniors to look at that experience through the eyes of faith and Marist spirituality. They asked me to do that in 2015, and they continue to ask me to send the letter. It will be coming your way in December.

By then, we will be in the season of Advent, when the Church waits for the coming of Christ. You will have something to read while waiting for your college acceptance letters. If nothing else, reading it may help you to fall asleep. I recommend looking at it as you ready yourselves to go to bed.

I am 73 years old, which means there is about a 60-year gap between us. I am old enough to be your grandfather's age or that of your great-grandfather in some cases. It is said that the elderly, that's me, seem to enjoy a certain rapport with youth your age. While I have had little contact with any of you, I feel connected in a way I did not when I was younger. I want you to know that I am on your side. I am rooting for you.

I also know how challenging life can be. I realize that you face pressures I didn't face when I was your age. That translates into dealing with a lot more stress. Should that describe yourself, I hope you have taken advantage of our wonderful counseling department.

Our thoughts can impact our emotions. If we keep thinking the same thoughts that only add to our stress, we become like a car stuck in the mud. The tires keep spinning, but the car is going nowhere. We need new thoughts, different ideas, and a fresh way of thinking about our situation. Counselors are excellent resources for that. Please take advantage of them here and when you are in college should you feel the need to do so. They can help you to get back on track.

Another way to get back on track is to listen to our Lord, who speaks to us through the Scriptures. I want you to be attentive to today's Gospel when Jesus performed his first public miracle. Listen with me to what Mary says to Jesus, "They have no wine."

A first-century Jew understood that wine represented divine life. Why? Well, a glass of wine can lift our psyches. Its taste, scent, and texture can complement the other food we are eating and enhance the overall dining experience.

Well, the divine life is meant to lift us spiritually. We are meant to be intoxicated with the Holy Spirit. That means we are to lose ourselves or be taken up and into the divine life of love, the Holy Spirit. When Mary says, "They have no wine," she speaks on behalf of Israel, which has lost its connection with the divine life because of sin. In other words, Israel, representing the whole human race, is running out of grace and on empty." They have no wine.

How many of us can identify with knowing what that is like? I know I can.

Here is where the mother of Jesus counsels us by sharing her wisdom. She addresses the servants and, in turn, the Church, including you and me, and says, "Do whatever he tells you." In other words, if you feel

cut off from the divine life, if you feel like you are running on empty, if your life is no longer intoxicating, meaning uplifting, fulfilling, or purposeful, Mary shows us the way to get back on track, to get out of the rut. She says, “Do whatever he, Jesus, tells you.”

Why is that important? People will talk about being destined to live their lives in a particular way. They may also say that they could do nothing else with their lives other than what they are doing or have done. Note that there is no resentment or anger as if they were doing something against their will. Instead, they willingly submit to a higher power and are happy because their lives have become meaningful and purposeful.

If we were to use religious language, what people call destiny, fate, or a higher power, we call God. And submitting to God is to be like Mary, who said, “Let it be done to me according to your word.” There is nothing more intoxicating, uplifting, and fun than being in sync, or on the same page with God’s intentions for us. We want to come to that point in our lives when we can say, “I am where I am supposed to be.”

Hopefully, there will be points in your lives when you may find yourselves echoing the words of St. Peter, who, after the transfiguration of Jesus, said, “Lord, it is good we are here.” And to get there will include enduring hardships of various kinds. Still, there will come a time when you can say, “It was worth it.” Then, your life has become like a glass of wine that brings out the flavor of the gift of life that God intends us to enjoy.

In those moments, you realize you have not been running on empty as you may have thought. Instead, you have been running with God all that time. Most likely, you were never conscious of that dynamic because, using Marist language, it was “as if hidden and unknown to you.” God enjoys surprising us, especially when we think we are least deserving, which is all the time if we are honest. That is why we refer to those moments and that dynamic as grace which means gift.

I will end with this thought. Graduates from a Jesuit-sponsored school will leave with these words ringing in their ears, “We are men and women for others.” If you talk to alumni from a Jesuit school, at some point, they will speak of themselves in that way.

When you graduate from a Marist school, we want you to leave with these words ringing in your ears, “Do whatever he tells you.” That, by the way, is the Work of Mary.

And remember, I’m on your side. I’m rooting for you.