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Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

The Golden Jubilee of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Mass for Catholic High School Seniors

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

August 30, 2006

Allow me to welcome you to our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. I want to go back to 1956 and give you some idea of what was in the headlines that particular year. So, for a few moments, accompany me down memory lane and you can check what I say with your parents and grandparents who will remember that time very vividly.

As usual there was another war in the Middle East. It involved Britain and France and Israel and Egypt. There was a major dispute about the ownership and the control of the Suez Canal. In the resulting feud Israel took advantage of the turmoil to seize the Sinai Peninsula. In central Europe the Hungarians, sensing freedom, revolted and made a statement by toppling a 23-foot statue of Stalin in the center of Budapest. Their aspirations were brutally crushed by the Soviet Union.

Here in the United States the battle for civil rights was at its height. Rosa Parks refused to sit at the back of the bus and boycotts were an everyday occurrence.

In 1956 Eisenhower and his running mate, Nixon, were reelected to the White House for another term.

Elvis Presley was at the top of the charts with two well-remembered songs; *Hound Dog* and *Love me Tender*. His gyrating style, while on stage, raised many eyebrows and parents maintained he was a poor image for their teenagers. On his TV show, Ed Sullivan introduced him as "just one big hunk of forbidden fruit." The great musical hit of the year was "My Fair Lady" with its well-known lyrics, *Wouldn't it Be Lovely* and *I Could Have Danced All Night*.

The Olympic Games staged in Melbourne, Australia, was listed as the sports event of the year.

And, horrors of horrors, I would like you to keep in mind that there were no cell phones, CD's or DVD 's and the Super Bowl hadn't been invented yet!

In the midst of all this, in news which was highlighted locally, the Holy See, recognizing the growth of Catholicism here in the state of Missouri, established two new dioceses, Jefferson City and Springfield-Cape Girardeau. It reduced the size of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and amalgamated the two dioceses of St. Joseph and Kansas City. As St. Joseph had been established in 1868 and Kansas City in 1880, this process should not be described as a birth, rather it was a marriage. When Bishop Hogan, the founder of both dioceses, came to Kansas City in 1880, he found a nondescript chapel on this location surrounded by a vast heap of bricks, the products of a brick factory built by the famous Father Donnelly. From these bricks Bishop Hogan built this Cathedral.

Why have you been invited here? Because you are the product of this hyphenated diocese, the young adults of our time, the hope of our future, our potential leaders in the church and society for the next 50 years. Much has been achieved but much more remains to be done and I hope and pray that you will be equal to the task and do a better job than my generation.

Please appreciate the opportunity you have been given. Don't take it for granted. The schooling you are receiving puts you in the top 2% of the world's teenagers.

Your challenge will be to deal with a world where there is still too much war, violence, prejudice, disease, hunger and homelessness and some of it, to our shame, is very close to home.

I am not worried about your future from the academic point of view. Time and time again your seven schools have produced top students who have made names for themselves in the Arts, Sciences, Medicine, Law and Business. Unfortunately, there are always a few who disdain the opportunity and fritter away their futures.

Because your future is potentially so bright, I am worried that you may allow material success to go to your heads. You may become so selfish, so self-righteous, so intolerable that you deliberately ignore the fact that your education is totally imbued with the spirit and the personality of Christ.

Christ and his teachings constitute the one topic which is different from all the others on your curriculum. You may call it "religion" or you may call it "theology." Why is it different? It is different because it is more than an intellectual exercise. It is meant to form your conscience, to mold your heart, to deepen your faith and to set standards for your behavior. It is meant to put you in touch with God. If it doesn't then there is something awfully wrong.

Knowing the facts of your religion is one thing and very necessary, but living it in a Christ-like manner is vital; without the latter we replace integrity with hypocrisy and become one with those about whom Jesus complained, "they honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me."

In centuries past emigrants advised their children to "make something of yourself." The parents saw the potential if not always the finished product. Michelangelo was one of the few men of his time who could look at a block of marble and see the Pieta within it and then extract it!

Remember, the pile of bricks. In them Bishop Hogan saw a cathedral.

Each one of you is "a pile of bricks." With the help of your parents, your teachers, your friends and your God, you can fashion that unique personality whose model is Christ. In doing so you will continually find happiness, not only in your individual achievements, but especially in reaching out and loving others.