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Mass of the Holy Spirit
Convocation for Diocesan Teachers
August 13, 2005



In a few days we will celebrate the Solemnity of Mary's Assumption. While I ask her maternal intercession on the beginning of our school year, I also note how this feast always marked, during my time as a teacher, the approaching end of the students' summer vacation and the opening of the year. So be it! Off we go into another good year.

This is my first time celebrating with you since becoming Diocesan Bishop. I want to welcome you and thank you for your dedication in returning to this tremendous work of Catholic Education. For those who are prepar-

ing to start their first year with us, I wish you every grace and blessing and commend you to a good camaraderie with your fellow teachers and administrators.

I want to also greet the pastors and other priests here. You make a great sacrifice to "make our schools work" while costs and other challenges increase. At the same time, you know as I do what these schools mean for the practice of the faith. The students who graduate from our Catholic schools are more likely to be our most active parishioners and supporters in many parish endeavors. We know that our educational institutions make a significant contribution to the well-being and vitality of our communities at large, and we hope and pray that efforts to provide real school choice to parents -- with Catholic schools as an option -- or at least some practical assistance to families in districts that are not meeting basic accreditation criteria -- will be recognized by our elected legislators.

The responsibility of parents to be the first teachers of their children in the faith, is greatly assisted through the efforts and sacrifices of our parishes to maintain and fortify our Catholic schools. Accept my thanks and please convey to your faithful parishioners -- many of whom do not have children currently in the schools and nonetheless generously support the endeavor of Catholic education -- the gratitude of the Church for the continuation of our schools.

The theme you have chosen for your school year is *Celebrating the Year of the Eucharist: Life in Christ!* Our dear late Holy Father John Paul II inaugurated this Year of the Eucharist last October, and while we remember him gratefully to God, we are strengthened by this strong teaching and example to fully live what was his love for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in its beauty and integrity. In the next few days Pope Benedict XVI will meet with youth in Cologne, Germany for his first World Youth Day as Pope. In his solemn Mass of inauguration, he announced with great confidence, "The Church is alive! And the Church is young!" We know this as well and are enthusiastic for the opportunities we have to re-invigorate the Church with well-

formed young people who love the Church -- who love the Holy Father -- who love the Mass and the sacraments.

Pope John Paul has challenged us in the last years to regain, where necessary, the sense of awe and wonder that must rightfully accompany the celebration of the mysteries of our salvation. What takes place here is much more than a celebration of community or, in his words "merely a fraternal meal." Here on the altar is made really present the living sacrifice of Calvary. Here is re-presented --each time we celebrate -- the dying and rising of Jesus, by which he first gave Himself -- His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity -- to His apostles, and then consummated this complete self-offering through His agony, His being handed over even by His friends, and the pouring out of His life on the Cross for our salvation.

In his encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* Pope John Paul reminded us that the Easter mystery - Christ's dying and rising as the cause of our salvation is "gathered up, foreshadowed, and concentrated forever in the gift of the Eucharist."

In the mystery of His dying and rising, Jesus Christ redefined the meaning of life, because He purchased our life with His blood and made it possible to live a completely new life to the extent that we are faithful to Him. For us, now, we can truly say, "Life is Christ." For our students and their families who choose to make a large sacrifice to attend our schools, it seems clear that they do so because, not only do they want an outstanding academic education for their children -- and they do indeed receive this -- but they are grasping to see realized in their lives this great mystery, "Life is Christ."

They look to us not just for education, but for formation. And to the extent that we are faithful to our mission -- to the extent that we are willing to rethink everything to be more and more faithful to our mission, we can offer to parents the assistance to achieve even more than solid Catholic formation. We can help them see TRANSFORMATION. We must determine to let this happen to ourselves -- and then also to our students, such that for us, "Life is Christ."

Under the power of the Holy Spirit whose help we invoke today in this holy Mass, we can hope to see -- and we dare to pray for -- the transformation of our lives, of our students' lives, of our schools, into people and places wherein dwells Jesus Christ. It seems then that you have chosen the right theme for this school year, because through no other means can we better prepare to be transformed into Jesus Christ than through the Holy Eucharist.

So no, what are you going to do to make this real? For yourselves and for your students? How can we make this theme "stick" so that next year we will not have forgotten what it was we talked about today? More important than anything I talk about or suggest, what will you do in your schools to mark a turning point that you can forever associate with the Universal Church's Year of the Eucharist? Will you mark this historic moment in the Church, the conclusion of the papacy of the only Pope our students have known and the beginning of the pastoral guidance of Pope Benedict with something that will be more than a plaque or a photo?

I suppose you are thinking that maybe I have a few suggestions -- and you are correct. I will mention three. I offer them not merely as suggestions, but rather as challenges! I hope you will give them consideration in a collaborative way and decide that you will do *more* than implement them -- as I encourage you to do. Instead, I challenge you to surpass them!
FIRST: Consider extending your celebrations of Holy Mass, celebrating Mass with the students more often, more frequently, and with the necessary help of your pastors, adding school-

initiated times for Eucharistic adoration.

At this point those in charge of scheduling are ready to throw their computers at me. I know, I used to do such scheduling. But we must increase the opportunities for the students to hear God's Word and receive Him in the context of Holy Mass. And I am not speaking of Communion services but Holy Mass.

This will also be a sacrifice for our priests as well, and I ask them to be as accommodating as they can for this most central event of our life of faith. If we say, our "Life is Christ," the more frequent celebration of Holy Mass must become the anchor for this transformation. I pray that it will send a signal also to our school families and parents that -- even above this -- their radical re-commitment to assist at Mass on Sundays and Holydays, and bring their children with them every single week, will help to renew the life of our parishes. This is so basic. But, indeed, the keeping of the Lord's Day by means of faithful attendance at Sunday Mass must be a constant reminder that we make to each other. The Lord's Day will be the spiritual starting point to fortify our work week, or we will lose our way completely in a culture that is increasingly materialistic.

As I mentioned, I would also recommend that you consider making visits with your students to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. Most of our students are not capable of making visits of an hour or even a half-hour, but depending on their capacity, short visits to the church can help to provide both a preparation and a continuation of what takes place in Holy Mass.

Dear friends, if we want to say "Our Life is Christ," we have to put ourselves in touch with Him more frequently, in the most significant manner in which He has determined to be with us, in His Eucharistic Presence. This leads to my second recommendation.

SECOND: Let us make a concerted effort to teach our students the meaning of the Lord's Eucharistic presence and increase their reverence for Him in the Blessed Sacrament. I have seen great variations of this sense of reverence in the church's I visit, but we can all work on this to cause, here also, a transformation.

Let us watch how our students enter and leave the church. Do they know how to genuflect and do they know why they do it? How do they bless themselves with the holy water that reminds us of our Baptism and make the sign of the Cross?

Prayerfulness grows in a spirit of recollection. I know how you, as teachers, try to keep good order in your classrooms so that much learning can take place. Let us similarly put our efforts into making the church a place where we see and express together a tremendous reverence for the presence of Him who is the very source and summit of holiness. I firmly believe that a conscious recognition of and reverence for God's sacramental presence will increase our recognition of and reverence for the dignity and worth of our brothers and sisters. We will know better how to reverence each other when we have first given God his due. Let us promote a spirit of silence before and after Mass -- in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament -- so that meaningful recollection and fruitful prayer can take place.

In the preparation of your school Masses, try hard to sustain the integrity of authentic liturgy by avoiding anything that smacks of trends or gimmicks, or trivializes the greatness of the mysteries we celebrate. Children surprise us often with the sophistication of the spiritual capacity and their spiritual needs and hungers. We have to recognize and feed this.

Joy will never be compromised if we let the purity and beauty of the Church's liturgy shine forth in its full integrity. Children will be mentioning at home what is being worked on in school -- our efforts to be more and more reverent. This will only help our parish celebrations.

THIRD: Taking our lead from our Lord in today's Gospel, let us better prepare to celebrate the joy of His risen life in the Eucharist, by a renewed commitment to His precious Sacrament of Peace: Confession or Reconciliation.

Again let us work with our students diligently and in such a way that their parents and older brothers and sisters will be encouraged to reclaim what I have already many times noted is something of a "lost sacrament." Prepare the students well to examine their consciences, and be ready to celebrate confession.

If there are strategies that you can devise with your pastors and parish leaders to encourage families to go together frequently -- as a family -- to confession you have my complete support and affirmation. I would suggest that Jesus Christ gave us this sacrament because He knows we are sinners. We must realize it also, and discover that we will never grow significantly in our spiritual life without daily examination of conscience and frequent confession. Again, the sacrifice of time from our priests will be great, but we will also have the satisfaction of knowing that we are doing most profoundly what we were ordained to do -- to reconcile and bring souls to Jesus Christ, our Life!

Dear teachers and pastors, you are already doing a great job! I truly thank you and sincerely encourage you to see what is our common and never-ending task to live Christ Jesus.

Teachers, you have an extraordinary DUAL COMMISSION. You are sent to each in the name of the Church and, at the same time, to lead and guide *in loco parentis*, in the position of parents. You nonetheless have the noble task of assisting them in the formidable task of forming our youth. Again and again you have shown yourself worthy of the task, and I invite you to renew yourself once again, particularly in light of the special challenge and invitation presented by this "Year of the Eucharist." Make it a year to remember!

Amen