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Bishop of Rapid City**

HOMILY FOR ST. THOMAS MORE
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral

Pentecost ~ May 27, 2012

I welcome all of you today to this Baccalaureate Mass; to the priests, the parents, family and friends of these graduates, and most especially to you, the St. Thomas More Graduating Class of 2012. It is great that we are all here for this celebration. We also come to the end of the Easter season as we celebrate today the Feast of Pentecost, the beginning of the Church... and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Mary and the Apostles. We, too, pray today for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

I think that we can make a pertinent correlation between graduation and Pentecost. Class of 2012: though we may be celebrating your graduation from High School, we have gathered today for these commencement exercises. Graduation refers to an ending of something. Commencement exercises imply a beginning of something. These commencement exercises are a formal way of sending you graduates forth into your *new beginnings*. You are given a charge to go out into the world with the wisdom and knowledge you have received and make the world a better place... to go out and use your talents and gifts and skills to better yourself and society. Beyond the experience of finishing classes and looking forward to the party, there may be some fear involved in this whole process... not knowing what the future holds... not knowing when a job will turn up... not knowing what college life will be like... not knowing what one wants to do with his or her life. And the question for some may be, **“Now, what do I do? Where do I go from here?”**

In a similar way, Pentecost was the commencement exercise for the disciples of the early Church. As I said, it was the birth of the Church. And I would suspect that the disciples, as they locked themselves in that Upper Room after the death and resurrection of Jesus, were asking themselves the same question, **“Where do we go from here?”**

When the Risen Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, **“Peace be with you. Receive the Holy Spirit,”** what they experienced was their **commencement**. They received **their commission to go into the world and make it a better place. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”**

Their call to use their gifts and talents to better themselves and those around them has commenced, has begun. The mission of Jesus was now in their hands. These disciples were sent out in all directions to carry on the mission of Jesus. These disciples were at a crossroads in their lives.

You are now graduating from high school and this is a time for celebration. You should be proud of your accomplishments. **But** you also stand at a major crossroads in your life. You have many decisions to make, about colleges, careers, and relationships. Every decision brings you closer to God’s ultimate plan for you, or distances you from God and weakens you as a person.

Like the disciples after the experience of Pentecost, these coming years are your most vulnerable years. You will be on your own for the first time, perhaps scattered in a different direction than your friends. Temptations will be greater as you try to fit into a new environment, as you try to find new friends, as you begin to expand your horizon. And like the early disciples, your faith will be tested in ways it has not been before. Choose now to be a martyr for Jesus, giving witness to His love and presence in your life. That is what a martyr is – it not so much about death, but about one who gives witness in their lives.

In these next years, God will provide you with the opportunity to grow into the person whom He has created you to be – growing toward your full potential. But in doing so, never lose sight of where you have come from, what you have learned at STM, and who those people are who have gotten you to this point in your life.

These next years will also provide you with the opportunity to reach farther than you ever have before. Do not settle for less. Always seek to rise above the level of mediocrity. The world is full of Christians who live their faith in a mediocre way. St. Thomas More, the saint, has set an example for you in morality and virtue.

The steadfastness and courage with which St. Thomas More held on to his religious convictions in the face of ruin and death, and the dignity with which he conducted himself during his imprisonment, trial, and execution contributed much to his reputation even to this day. His friend Erasmus defended More's character as "*more pure than any snow*" and described his character as "*such as England never had and never again will have.*" St. Thomas More was also described as "*a person of the greatest virtue this kingdom ever produced.*" And in a letter to Erasmus, he himself wrote, "*I do not care very much what men say of me, provided that God approves of me.*" This is the virtue which God asks of all of us.

These coming years will truly set the course of your lives as you leave the nest of your parents and are sent into the world on your own. In everything, it will be up to you to decide how you are going to live. You already know the right answer. You learned it in your high school. That's why a Catholic education is so important. It teaches you to live as children of God and as persons of faith.

It teaches you the truths of your faith and how to live them in your daily lives. It can be a tough world sometimes. So you have to stay true to who you are; true to whom God created you to be.

Prior to being baptized in the Spirit, the apostles lived in fear... in confusion... in disillusionment... in disunity. But after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit... **Their fear turned to faith... Their confusion turned to hope... Their disillusionment turned to love... Their disunity turned to community... And what came to life was a new courage in preaching the good news and a deep commitment to living it, even if it meant dying for it.** That is what the Spirit did for them... because that's the role of the Holy Spirit.

They now had courage to respond creatively to the signs of the times. They were "fired up"; overflowing with spiritual energy and God did amazing things... miraculous things through them... because that is what the Spirit does. And God will do amazing things with your lives as you continue to surrender them to Him.

No one can do the work of God or the will of God without the Holy Spirit; no one will do the work of God or the will of God without a real relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit;

And we won't see the work to be done or we won't come to know the will of God unless we ask/rely upon the Holy Spirit... Our daily prayer should be, "Stir up in me the gifts of the Spirit that You have given me so that I can use them to serve You and do Your work."

So stay close to Jesus Christ. He is *near!* Closer than the air you breathe! He wants to walk with you. He never leaves us alone. His Spirit has been given to you to guide you, but the work is still yours. As St. Thomas More stated, "*Those things we pray for, dear Lord, give us the grace to labor for.*"

Again, every decision brings you closer to God's ultimate plan for you, or distances you from God and weakens you as a person.

Commit your life to prayer and to the sacraments. Become a real friend of the Holy Spirit and miracles will happen in your life.

So today, as we gather for this holy Eucharist, we know that it is the Holy Spirit who transforms the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus and makes Jesus present among us today. We open our hearts to this encounter.

We also thank God for all of his blessings in our lives — especially for the blessings of our families; for the gift of our faith in Jesus Christ; and for the blessings of your Catholic education.

In this Eucharist, I want to ask special blessings for each of you graduates as you step out to continue your journey of faith in the world. Make your lives something beautiful that you offer to God!

And may Mary our Blessed Mother, the Seat of Wisdom, be your guide as you seek to use wisely the education you have received to be leaders in our society and faithful disciples of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

On this Feast of Pentecost, the gift of the Spirit has been unleashed upon the world. And we are recipients of this gift. **Without the Holy Spirit, we can do nothing. But with this Spirit, ALL things are possible.**

God bless all of you today and always!