

HOME SCHOOL GRADUATION 2009
Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC
St. Peter's Church in Volo
6 June 2009

Fr. Rice and I would to extend our congratulations to all of today's graduates. This day reflects the fruit of all the hard work that you have put into your studies. But just remember that it doesn't stop here. You elementary graduates have high school waiting in front of you. Many of you high school graduates not only have college waiting for you next year, but even more importantly, you have your entire adult lives ahead of you. And one of the most important lessons that you could take with you into the world is that you will never stop learning. All of us get to a point our lives when we finish formal education, but our entire life is a continual process of learning. If you aren't moving forward, you will only stagnate and go nowhere in life.

At events such as these, graduations or the opening of a new school year, it has often been customary to offer the Votive Mass to the Holy Spirit because He is the source of all Truth. We invoke the Holy Spirit at times like this because as Catholics we should want our quest for knowledge to be guided by truth and not the whimsical intellectual fads of the age. The Holy Spirit gives us those special spiritual gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge and counsel in order to help us sort out what is truth and what isn't, to put on the mind of God in order to see the world from His perspective and not from a worldly perspective.

In the first reading from the Prophet Ezekiel, we heard how God gathered up the Jews from the many countries among whom they had been scattered and brought them back to the land He had given them, so that He could make of them a people set apart, a

people of His own. When He said that He would cleanse them with water and place a new spirit within them, God was speaking symbolically about how He would “put them back on the right track.” But He was also alluding to a time to come when the waters of Baptism would literally wash clean the souls of men and He would place His Spirit within them, so that through the new grace of Baptism they would be able to more readily live by His statutes and observe His decrees.

But even when Sacred Scripture is talking about concrete events in the distant past, it is also always directly speaking to us today. Ezekiel wrote about how God separated the Jews from the nations but this also applies to us. By living as home school families, by going to parishes like St. Peter’s in Volo, by trying to live the authentic Catholic life in a world penetrated with secularism, materialism and hedonism, has God not taken you, so to speak, from among the nations? Has He not gathered you from peoples, who are now foreign to you—sometimes even relatives, who perhaps don’t see eye-to-eye with you in matters of faith and morals? He has cleansed us all from the impurities of Original Sin in the waters of Baptism. But here we have to take pause.

Ezekiel speaks of cleansing us from all our idols and placing a new heart within us in place of our stony hearts. Baptism does cleanse us from Original Sin but it doesn’t take away the effects of that first sin, such as concupiscence and the inclination toward sin. Baptism doesn’t cleanse and save us once for all in the manner that Baptists profess. God has given us His grace and placed a new Spirit within us but we are in constant need of conversion because, just like the Israelites, we have the tendency to slip back into the idolatry of self-love and self-will. All of us have a tendency to set up our own idols from which we must constantly be cleansed in the Sacrament of Penance, a sacrament which

flows from the healing waters of Baptism. These aren't the idols of times past, idols of gold and silver and stone. In our age they are the idols money, prestige, power and pleasure. And there are also the idols that we make of our own selves through pride and inordinate self-love. All of these idols make our hearts as hard and cold as the stone from which the ancients used to carve their gods. We have to constantly allow God's grace to cleanse us of our idols, so that He can replace hearts turned stony cold from a love of the things of this world with natural hearts motivated rather by love of God. But for Him to do this we have to remove obstacles to His grace and allow Him to do it because He will not force Himself upon us. We have to want Him to replace the stony hearts of self-love with natural hearts of divine love.

All of us are in constant need of conversion. None of us can sit back self-contented and say that we don't have to try anymore. You have all been taken from the corrupted world around us and educated in the life of faith but we are all still surrounded on every side by the world. And there will come a time when each one of you will have to go out to meet it on its own terms in its hard realities. But how will you fare? Will you hold fast and true to all that you have learned about your faith? It won't be as simple as pulling out a resume listing your qualifications as traditional home schooled Catholics that will automatically shield you from all of the world's influences. There are home schoolers, who have succumbed to the temptations of the world just like others. There are traditional Catholics, who have gone astray just like others. There are even traditional religious orders and priests, who have fallen into scandal just like others.

You can't be complacent. You can't stop trying every day of your lives to become better Catholics because remember that when you stop rowing upstream in a river, you

will only float back downstream and lose all the ground that you gained. That's why you have to constantly paddle upstream against the current of our times, against the current of our culture. You have to continue to learn more about your faith and you have to strive to live your faith more and more fervently. Just knowing all the facts will do you little good if you don't put it into practice. Memorizing the Baltimore Catechism won't do you any good if you don't internalize these truths so deeply that they become a very part of your being.

And how best to do this? Let's look to today's gospel. Jesus says that He will ask the Father to give us the Spirit of Truth, who will remain with us and be within us. But He says that He will do this on the following condition: "If you love me, and obey the commands I give you." (John 14:15) Love and obedience. Neither of them are something that we can learn from a book. Rather, they are acts of our will that spring from the heart. Without love and obedience, we cannot follow God's will. Without love and obedience, we cannot make it to heaven. Love God with your whole heart, your whole mind, and your whole soul and love your neighbor as yourself. Obey your parents, obey your pastors, obey your superiors and all legitimate authority that God has placed over you. Do all this and you will be pleasing to God. Do all this and you will show your love for God, just as Jesus did by obeying the Father in all things. Do this and you will have the natural hearts about which Ezekiel wrote many centuries ago. Then, God will put His Spirit within them, you shall be His people and He will be your God.