

St. Rose Academy 8th Grade Graduation – May 16, 2019 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 6:00pm Mass & Graduation – 585 words

In the gospel we heard about the washing of the feet, which takes us back to Holy Week – to Holy Thursday, to be precise. At the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper we even have the option of reenacting the foot-washing, and the Missal tells the priest that he is to focus on three things in his homily: the institution of the Holy Eucharist, the institution of the sacred priesthood, and the Lord’s commandment of fraternal charity – service to others. You see, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet at the Last Supper, when he also made them his first priests and gave them the gift of the Eucharist. The priesthood, the Eucharist, and service all go together.

During the years that you have spent at St. Rose, you have learned about all three of these sacred realities. Each week or almost every week one of the local priests has come to celebrate Holy Mass in your gym. I am grateful for the many occasions I have been able to do this. Priests have come to hear your confessions and for other special occasions, such as the blessing of the new addition on the school a little while back. Indeed, not only have you all grown since starting at St. Rose, but the school itself has grown! And you have had many opportunities for service, which have been part of your growth also during these special years.

Now on Holy Thursday we were thinking and praying about the Lord’s suffering, his sacrifice for our sins. The very next day he died on the cross. Then there would be the silence of the tomb on Holy Saturday. Then, on Easter Sunday, the glory and joy of the resurrection. We share in this pattern in our own lives. We all have our own Good Fridays – though never the way our Lord did; there are also many times when the Lord seems silent, or when life is otherwise rather dull and low-key; there are many joyous and even glorious moments also. School graduation is certainly one of those, and we all share in your joy today.

Just as the Lord’s passion, death, and resurrection are patterns for our lives and we share in them all, so also the Eucharist, the priesthood, and service need to be patterns. Let’s think especially about that last one, the one at the beginning of today’s gospel: service. The Catholics among you have, if I am not mistaken, all already been confirmed. So you might not have to worry about service hours anymore. Some of you will go to public schools or otherwise not have as many opportunities for service. But will you continue to do so, even if you have to find the opportunities yourself – even if you don’t have to accumulate hours?

Service is the model Jesus gave us. It’s a form of kindness, and kindness always makes the world better. It forms character and helps us overcome our selfishness. Service helps us become more like Christ, who came not to be served but to serve. Whatever the future holds for you graduates, may the lessons of service you learned at St. Rose be among those that stay with you and shape your lives. You have learned many other fine lessons as well, including about Christ’s presence in the priesthood and especially on the altar at Holy Mass. As we continue with this Mass, we give thanks for all that St. Rose has given you – and all that you have given St. Rose!