

September 8, 2011

Welcome. Mass of the Holy Spirit and Matriculation Ceremony  
Charles L. Flynn, Jr., President

Archbishop Dolan, welcome to the College of Mount Saint Vincent. We are all pleased and honored to have you celebrate Mass for us today.

Members of the Class of 2015, because of the hurricane, this Mass of the Holy Spirit and Matriculation Ceremony is the first occasion I've had to welcome you to the College.

Over 200 years ago, Elizabeth Seton and our Sisters of Charity began their extraordinary work. 164 years ago, with a deep dedication to excellence, the Sisters of Charity established this institution of higher learning, and in the tradition of liberal education, began preparing students for lives of accomplishment and service.

At Mount Saint Vincent and many Catholic Colleges, the Mass of the Holy Spirit and a Matriculation Ceremony are celebrated together, for they are the way that we—Catholics and those of other denominations and faiths alike—symbolically and ritually commit ourselves to our work together.

At every Catholic college and university across the world, the liturgy of the Mass of the Holy Spirit is the liturgy of Pentecost. Pentecost occurs 50 days after Easter. In the Church calendar, it is the conclusion of – the fulfillment of – Easter. No day in the Church calendar better symbolizes the identity of this academic institution.

Remember, after Easter, the Apostles had fled Jerusalem in fear for their lives. In Jesus of Nazareth they had had the incarnation of everything good, and beautiful, and great—everything Divine. He was their friend and rabbi, meaning teacher. He had taught them the spirit and meaning of God love.

With the Crucifixion, the Apostles knew that they/that we all had rejected and betrayed Jesus of Nazareth. Remember, Peter had denied three times that he even knew Him.

And remember, people (meaning we all) rejected the incarnation of everything Divine not out of mistaken idealism, not out of any poor judgment with good intentions, but rather people (we all) had rejected and betrayed Him out of pettiness and fear.

So back to Pentecost. On Pentecost, 50 days after Easter, the Apostles had snuck back into Jerusalem. With Mary, they were hiding, locked in a room. They were scared. Like us, they were all plenty human.

Imagine what they felt in that room? All of us who have felt the terrible loneliness of grief can imagine how hopeless they were—a despair made worse by anger and their own

guilt. Remember Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew. They were all Jews. Indeed, remember that one understanding of Christianity is as a formulation of Judaism shared by people with faith that the Messiah has come.

Remember, the leader of the Apostles was now Peter (we remember him as the first pope). Jesus the rabbi had taught him, had taught them all.

Through the Gospels we've seen Peter often enough. Repeatedly, Christ asks Peter questions. Peter knew what Christ was saying. He had knowledge. Yet over and over again, while we-- reading and listening to those same questions 2000 years later-- we recognize what the answers to those questions should be . . . Nonetheless, Peter always—every time-- gets the answers dead wrong. He's so wrong, that two thousand years later, we keep saying to ourselves: don't you get it? Don't you get it? Why don't you get it? We know that Peter wasn't a dope, but in the Bible he always misses the point. He never gets an answer right.

You've had that experience. We all have. I had it every time I took course philosophy.

But back to Pentecost. Simon Peter, the other Apostles, and Mary were locked in this room. They were in despair and cowering in fear. And it was Shavot—it was the Feast of Weeks in the Jewish Calendar—a day commemorating God's gift of the law to Moses, the gift of the things Christ was teaching about. And on this Shavot, this Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon them.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit can make for some strange stories. What's about these little flames over people's heads? And what's with the dove? It's a challenge to think of God as a tongue of fire or as a bird.

But what descended upon the Apostles, expressed in the gift of light, the flame of ardor, and the dove of peace, what descended upon the Apostles was the Spirit of faith and hope. As Pope Benedict says, faith and hope are much the same thing.

With the Holy Spirit, the Peter and the other Apostles changed. Peter and the other Apostles went from having not only knowledge (including knowledge of the Law) to also having understanding informed by faith and charity.

They left that room. They left with courage. They were no longer hesitant and clueless. They all, including Peter, left that room getting it right. They all left that room on Shavot to teach thousands of every nation--and to bring the news of God to people everywhere—the news of hope and love.

This is why the Academic Year begins with a celebration of the liturgy of Pentecost. With your matriculation and the opening of the Academic Year, you and we all are asked to dedicate ourselves not only to knowledge but also to understanding, not only to skills, but also to each other. We all are asked to seek lives of faith, hope, and love.

The motto of this College summarizes these purposes of mind and heart: Teach me goodness, discipline, and knowledge. Some colleges and universities have smaller hopes. It is a point of great pride that at Mount Saint Vincent we do such work together.

Welcome to you all.

Archbishop Dolan, again, welcome to our College.