



COLLEGE OF MOUNT SAINT VINCENT

September 9, 2020

Mass of the Holy Spirit

At all colleges and universities in the Catholic tradition, the Mass of the Holy Spirit opens each academic year. For some of us, it is a religious ceremony. For all of us, it is a ritual reaffirmation of the values and hope with which the Sisters of Charity founded and sponsor this College.

Our values are in our mission statement: “an understanding of our common humanity (our equality), a commitment to human dignity (our worth), and a full appreciation of our obligations to each other (service and justice).”

These are the values with which Christianity spread among the poor of Imperial Rome. These are the values of which St. Vincent DePaul reminded the privileged court of an absolute monarch. These are the values that undergird our democracy.

This year, these values cannot be taken for granted. It is essential that we reaffirm them in our hearts and our actions.

Across our nation, we as one people are ripping ourselves apart.

Most obviously, we are reckoning with the fundamental sin of racism, but, issues are as innumerable as they are immense.

- It's true of immigration.
- It's true of instances of police criminality
- It's true of issues of global warming
- It's true of abortion
- It's true of COVID
- It's true of poverty

We would all hope that commitment to shared fundamental values would unite us in our plurality. But honestly, it appears that we have lost confidence in each other's commitment to equality, dignity, service, and justice-- to democracy, the constitution, and the rule of law. We as an indivisible people have lost confidence in each other.

I will take one fraught issue as an emotion-charged example.

In some quarters, it is increasingly a political trope to deny the reality and virulence of racism. These are absurd, demonstrably untrue denials. They preclude conversation; indeed, they preclude hope.

Conversely, there are people who indiscriminately attack those with whom they disagree, and positions they do not share, as racist --no matter how disconnected from racism the person, action, or position may be.

For example, where is justice when a professor is suspended from teaching a class because his lecture included a pertinent reference to a Chinese term that sounds somewhat like an English language racial epithet.

Both the deniers of racism and those who cavalierly attribute racism to people with whom they disagree are employing rhetorical tactics that preclude understanding, progress, and hope.

I do not know how we as an indivisible people will once again find common ideals that will unite us, as we seek our shared future. At times, I despair of our deteriorating commitment to equality, dignity, democracy, and the rule of law. None of us knows how our country can find its way home.

But at this College, we are unshakably committed to our founding values. They are a point of identity and pride. They are not neutral. They demand that we keep our heads while other people are losing theirs. They demand discussion and debate. They are inviolable. They are a light that illuminates our souls. They are one more way that this great college will continue to bring the light of hope to a stormy world.