

Father Ron Sibugan,A.A.
Homily for Baccalaureate Mass 2018
May 12th, 2018
Unity - Goodness - Sanctity

Bishop McManus, Bishop Barron, President Cesareo, members of the Class of 2018, honored guests, one and all, Good evening to all of you!

Students, I have had the great privilege of being able to share a meal with many of you. For, as most of you know, I live in one of the dorms here at Assumption, in Plough, and part of my responsibilities as a minister in the residence halls is to deepen my relationships with students and serve in the dorms as a minister. By way of doing that, I have been inviting students, many of you here tonight, to a cooked meal! It's truly a great ministry. I joke with Father John that one

of my responsibilities at Assumption is not only that of a priest and campus minister, but also that of a cook ----- but your mothers and grandmothers here today need not worry. I usually cook rice with chicken adobo, or pasta with chicken parm or chicken picatta. I guess many of you who had a meal with me liked it well enough that you asked me to deliver the homily on this very special occasion of your Baccalaureate Mass tonight. Actually what I'd like to share with you today is the significance of having a meal together.

So, meals bring us together. Many of you would agree that most of our successful programs here on Campus, including Campus Ministry events include food. First Thursday bagels, Agape Latte and many more. I would suspect that many of you would agree that one of the unforgettable experiences you had here at Assumption had something to do with food, perhaps sharing a meal at Taylor or maybe at the Boynton or somewhere along Shrewsbury Street. Recently one of you mentioned to me that one thing that you will miss from your experience at Assumption will be time spent together at Taylor, where you stayed for hours and hours just hanging out, talking about sports and debating who is the greatest quarterback of all time: Tom Brady or Peyton Manning, or complaining about some of your difficult courses, or even just discussing silly things like a boy-friend's new haircut or a professor's new outfit. Meals bring all of us together.

And how appropriate it is for all of you here tonight that the gospel we just heard is taken from the meal setting, the account of Jesus' Last Supper. It, too, was a time for sharing but a very significant moment, it is a time of saying goodbye, Jesus to his disciples. It includes a beautiful prayer that Jesus made in the presence of his disciples before he would depart from them, but it is a prayer which he intended for us as well, gathered around this table some 2,000 years later. This prayer is clearly so very personal and intense. You can just feel Jesus' emotion in these farewell words to those who were closest to him, those who would carry on his mission. You can almost touch his anguish and the concern he has for them.

In this prayer, there are three things that Jesus asks his Father to grant to his disciples and that I and all of us here at Assumption pray will be yours as well, as you leave the College. I want you to remember these three letters: UGS. You can understand this acronym as Undergrad Student or University Graduate Student. But for me, U stands for Unity, G stands for Goodness because God protects us from all evil, and S stands for Sanctity which is another word for Holiness.

UNITY

In the Gospel reading that we just heard, Jesus first asks the Father to keep his disciples in the Father's name so that they may be one. The unity that exists between Jesus and his Father is the very unity that he wishes for his disciples, that it be their strength no matter what the circumstances. This is the gift he wishes to give all of us, that, in fact, he constantly offers to all of us because that is who he is and what he has always done. He establishes our unity. He makes us one…if only we embrace the invitation.

How so? By uniting us in Christ. For those of us who are baptized Christians, we have this in common. We are children of God, washed clean in Christ, and gifted with the Holy Spirit. God is One and there is nothing greater that he wishes to share with us than this unity. It is God who establishes this unity.

And if we are one, we demonstrate this oneness in the life that we share, our life together. We love one another. We care for one another. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. When one suffers, we all suffer.

For four years here at Assumption College, I think many of you experienced those moments when we became one in mind and heart for the greater good of our world, our country, our neighboring community and the Assumption College community.

For example, we became one in prayer when we learned of the horrific episodes of violence here in the United States, some of which touched home here at Assumption, when our community was affected, like the mass killings in Las Vegas. We became one in prayer for those who have been affected by the violence throughout the world, the uncounted masses who have died in the Middle East, especially Syria or those decimated by disease and hunger in Africa. We became one in remembering those who died in too many school shootings throughout the United States, including the tragic, recent one in Florida that led everyone on campus to observe a moment of silence.

Here in Worcester, we became one when so many of us responded to the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Worcester area through volunteer programs or through Working for Worcester. How evident this was this year when more than 100 student leaders became involved in local service and more than 160 volunteers participated in Working for Worcester alone.

We became one when Ari, a member of the baseball team, passed away: he who had touched so many lives, he who brought us together to console one another and his family.

Here on campus, we united as a community when we gathered together in some of our favorite celebrations: Midnight Madness, football playoffs, even on Thanksgiving Weekend. And who can forget Duck Day, when we all gathered around the pond and marked the annual return of our white-winged celebrities, a day that also brings us together with hundreds of local school-children and neighborhood families, not to mention the needy school-children in the heart of Africa who benefited from this event thanks to the efforts of the SGA.

Last but not least, some of you also became of one heart and mind in bringing your gifts and talents to so many organizations and sports team you joined and became part of here at Assumption?

All these things bore testimony to our efforts to build community. Those are only a few of the testimonies that we should not forget and should continue to treasure. They remind us that we can also be agents of unity no matter where we are. And that is our prayer for you tonight.

G stands for Goodness because God protects us from all evil

Jesus prayed that his disciples be protected from all evil. As you can imagine, the mission that Jesus gave to his disciples would entail great danger and so he prays for their protection as they go into the world. He knew full well that he could not spare them the trials, the physical suffering, the anxieties, the disappointments, and disillusionment that would accompany their mission.

The Christian life is a constant battle against evil. In our culture today, it is so easy to be seduced by the power of consumerism, individualism, violence, division and spiritualities that have nothing to do with God, as Pope Francis recently wrote in his exhortation entitled, *Rejoice and be glad*
. He calls us to rejoice and be glad because Christians are called to counter those who would foment hate and division.

Jesus is asking us to be protected from the evil in the world and, as his disciples, to be agents of change. How, you might ask? Jesus never abandoned us. He sent us His Spirit that gives us the strength and courage to withstand the temptations of the devil. This Spirit, that stirs within us, will give us a completely different heart—a spirit of peace and not of hatred, a spirit of charity and not of cruelty, a spirit of generosity and not of selfishness, a spirit of joy and not of sadness and misery. What we need to do is to listen to it and be attentive to the Spirit that God who is good, has given to us. Jesus asks all of us to conquer evil.

S stands for Sanctity, another word for Holiness.

Jesus prays that we might be sanctify us for truth. Sanctify is another word for holiness. Here sanctity does not mean first of all being perfect (but it's not excluded!). It refers essentially to a life that is so aligned with God's will for you that everything you do reflects God's love. So people considered "sanctified," holy, are those who do the will of God in their lives and who are committed to God's purposes and presence. Jesus understands that a complete commitment to the truth discovered in God's will is the way to achieving this holiness. Pope Francis in his recent exhortation defined holiness as a meditation on how to respond to Christ's invitation to be saints: to "Rejoice and be glad." We have been given some concrete examples here at Assumption College, especially some of our administrators, professors, staff members, classmates, roommates, coaches, who have dedicated themselves in supporting you, inside and outside of the classroom. They have kept believing in you and have helped you to become what you are today. They have journeyed with you, helping you to discern your path in life, to discover the gifts and talents God has given you so that the world might be a better place because of you.

I would be remiss tonight, especially on this eve of Mother's Day, if I didn't mention one concrete example of holiness that Pope Francis cites in his exhortation, that of parents. He speaks of their many and often unseen acts of unselfish love, not the least of which were the sacrifices and the support that have made this day possible for you. Your greatest tribute to them would be your gratitude and, above all, your passing that love on to others.

So tonight as we share this sacred meal on the eve of your own departure, do not forget that Jesus prays for you, his modern-day disciples… Do not forget the 3 letter word: UGS, Unity - Goodness - Sanctity.

God bless you all!