

## Baccalaureate Mass 2007

Prayer is an act of intimacy. When we pray authentically, we lay bare before God our deepest weaknesses, our deepest fears, our deepest hopes, and our deepest desires. We disclose our true selves to God in the act of praying. We make ourselves vulnerable. And so normally when we pray, we do so alone and in silence, wanting only God to hear.

That is why the seventeenth chapter of John's gospel is so extraordinary: we get to listen in on Jesus's own intimacy with his father in his own prayer. This is Jesus' last quiet time with his Father on the night before he is to face his own death.

The content of the prayer is extraordinary. Jesus' prayer is not focused on himself, but on all his disciples: *I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.*

That means that Jesus is praying for us, because we are among those who believe in him through the words of the Apostles. In this prayer Jesus discloses his deepest desire for us, indeed the meaning of his Incarnation, his death, and his resurrection: That we might share in his own intimacy with the Father through the Spirit: *So that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may also be in us.* Jesus prays that we might share in his own love for the Father that is the Holy Spirit: *that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them.* This is an extraordinary prayer and an extraordinary gift. If you remember nothing else from your Providence College experience remember this: you were created in the image and likeness of God to share in very life of the Trinity, to know and love the Father through the Son and in the Spirit. This is Jesus' gift to you and prayer for you. This is your deepest vocation, beyond anything else that you will do with your lives. This is your eternal vocation.

In entering into this unity with God, we also become united with each other. One of the natural reactions at graduation time is anxiety and grieving because the community that we have known here is about to change. We wonder how we will stay connected and united. There are a lot of ways of doing this: phone calls, emails, reunions, letters, etc. are all ways that we try to say united. But our deepest bond is not in any of these, but in Christ's gift of his own life with us. It is by staying united with Christ that we will remain united with each other.

Nowhere is that unity more evident than when we pray together in the Eucharist like we are today. When we celebrate the Eucharist together, we enter into the priestly prayer of Christ. We realize the deepest hope of Christ that we share in God's own inner life of love. This is where the prayer comes true. This is where we realize our unity with God and with each other; wherever we are physically, we are spiritually united whenever we celebrate the Eucharist.

Graduation weekend is filled with advice about the future. Here is the most important thing that anyone is going to say to you this weekend: make sure that you pray. As you go forward from here, you will have a million excuses not to pray (including the celebration of the Eucharist) and prayer will be a choice for you among many other options about how to spend your time. Prayer is often the first thing that we cut out of our lives when we feel the press of time because it seems a dispensable luxury. Prayer is not a luxury, however, but the essential activity whereby we cultivate our deepest vocation to enter into the divine life opened up by the prayer of Christ. If

you do not pray, you will not remember who you really are in God and your entire life will get out of whack. Prayer is a gift that God wants us to accept; is not something that we do, but rather something that God does in us. Whenever we pray, we pray in the prayer of Christ to the Father and in the Spirit. We enter into the life of God. When we enter into that union with God we are united with each other in a bond that can never be broken and that lasts for eternity. For in the end, the only reunion that really matters is heaven. We realize a taste of that now in this Eucharist. Let us pray for each other, as Jesus prayed for us, that we might be one there forever in the life of the Triune God that we already share in today.