

Baccalaureate Mass

Homily by Rev. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., President of the University of San Francisco
May 15, 2014 | St. Ignatius Church

Your classmates selected the readings for this liturgy, which celebrates the completion of a major segment of your life's journey and the commencement of another. This is your one and only baccalaureate mass; my twenty-eighth and final [we do two a year]. Twenty-seven homilies later, I am running out of new things to say, so I decided to use the voices of your classmates to amplify the message of the three readings.

First off, we all hope that after your USF Jesuit education, you will do better than the young person in the first reading who stammers, "I know not how to speak; I am too young." Tens of thousands of dollars later, we expect that you have found your voice, are confident that you have something to say to the world, and say it with grace, integrity and courage.

One of your classmates wrote about an experience in El Salvador that sharply contrasts with the reluctance of the interlocutor in the first reading. She heard a phrase of the martyred Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, from a young Salvadoran kid named Oscarito, "cada uno de ustedes tiene que ser un microfono de Dios." She remembers sitting in a humble shack on a worn plastic chair, struggling to understand the Spanish, when the words leapt out at her and burned themselves into her consciousness.

She felt then the call that each of us has to be God's microphone – microfono de Dios. Never doubt that you have within you the capacity to amplify the voice of God. Do not fear to go wherever life sends you and to speak from the depths of your heart. We all have within us the God-given capacity to speak words of compassion, healing, acceptance, understanding, humor and welcome; and when we do, realize those are God's words, as well as ours. Imagine how much better our world would be if we were all God's microphones, rather than the loud speakers of a crass and heartless consumer culture.

The Gospel you selected uses the simple metaphor of a vine and branches to underscore our radical interconnectedness with each other. Jesus does not claim to be the roots, the trunk or the stump but the vine of which we are branches. Remember, Jesus is God at-one with us. We share God's life – that's Jesus' point. I defy you to separate a vine from its branches. Jesus used this image to teach us that we are not isolated automatons, separate one from another. As human beings we share more than a planet; we share the life of God that courses through every branch. The vine/branches example suggests a union so intimate that it is impossible to separate God's life from our life and our life from God's life and my life from yours. We are all one and we are all God's.

We are as much “of God” as the branches are “of the vine.” Be wary of those who would divide us into “in-groups” and “out-groups,” or pit us against each other, when all of us draw life from the same Godly source. No matter our color, or sexual orientation or country of origin or legal status or income level, we may all live the life of God. The second reading captures the essence of that Godly life in us and our life in God. It is, in the words of your second reading, “to fall in love, to stay in love” and to “let love decide everything.”

Lest this sound too Hallmark cardish, remember your classmate from 2010, Jennifer Moreno. She was the daughter of a single immigrant mother, the first in her family to go to college and, by all accounts, a shy and modest person. An ROTC scholarship allowed her to realize what she once thought was an impossible dream: graduating from USF as an army officer nurse.

In Afghanistan, she was part of a special operations unit that was called out at night last October to prevent a suicide attack in the city of Kandahar. The initial phase of the attack saw three people killed and eight wounded. The ground commander ordered all troops to stay in place so as not to set off any explosive devices. Jennifer disregarded that order to rush to the side of badly wounded comrade who needed her. Her commander said later that Moreno “disregarded her own well-being and ran into hell to save a severely wounded brother.” She chose to save another rather than protect herself. That’s our choice as well. None us will ever likely be called to Jennifer Moreno’s degree of heroism, but each of us, in our own way, can let God’s life flower in us by letting love – not our own narrow self-interest – but love decide everything. That’s what Jennifer did; we also can choose to let love decide.

This afternoon, I encourage you to relish the love that has supported you – your family, friends and mentors. Thank those who have “gotten out of bed” in the morning for you; acknowledge the persons who have been microfonos de Dios for you.

Now it is time for you to come fully alive with God’s life and love. It is time for you to turn up the volume and be microphones of God’s love and care for us all.