

Fourth Annual Outdoor Mass
Pope John Paul II Catholic High School
October 15, 2009

Homily by Most Reverend David E. Foley, D. D.

Often when priests move to a different parish or there are moves like your anticipated move to a new location, it reminds me of a story of the lady who owned a gift shop. She moved her gift shop from one end of town to another. After everything was in place and she had the gift shop just as she wanted it, she planned an Open House to welcome everyone to her new shop. A friend went to the local flower shop and ordered a flower arrangement to be sent to her. As he entered the gift shop the day of the Open House, he was delighted to see the arrangement he ordered nicely placed in a prominent place. He walked over to it, picked up the card to read the note, and to his utter shock, was appalled to see that it said "May You Rest In Peace." He went back to the flower shop and complained to the owner, who was very sorry about the mistake. After trying to make him feel better, the owner finally said, just look at it this way, imagine, in a funeral home tonight, someone will open your card and it will read "Good luck in your new location."

As we offer Mass in anticipation of a move to this new location, we know it is not luck that brought us here, but God's grace and the hard work of dedicated Catholics.

Over 10 years ago, a group of parents and people who had attended Catholic High Schools in their past, were convinced that a Catholic High School in Huntsville would give to students today, what they enjoyed -- a formation and development of their life in Jesus Christ, the Key of Knowledge.

The Gospel for today shows Christ in debate at a dinner in a leading Pharisee's home. St. Luke, in this section of his Gospel, written for both Jewish and Pagan converts to Christ, wanted to show them that Jesus Christ is the Key of Knowledge, the Authority of what they should believe and how they should live.

These early converts from the Jewish Faith had a difficult life. They had gone counter to their culture and upbringing. They were used to obeying 613 mosaic laws interpreted by scribes or lawyers who controlled their lives by legal prescriptions rather than obeying what God had revealed to them through the prophets and now in Jesus Christ.

When a Jew accepted Jesus as Lord and Messiah, he or she was ostracized from family and community. Mother and Father disowned them, brothers and sisters would not speak to them. If they had property, it was confiscated. They lost their jobs and need not apply for another.

To encourage these new Christians, St. Luke reflected on the principle that the Key of Knowledge and Truth is, what God reveals. Those who speak in the name of God, the prophets and now Jesus are the true agents of God and teach in His name with the authority of God.

And so no one need hesitate in following Christ because He is the Key to Knowledge and the Truth.

Later, St Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, would refer to this following of Jesus as The WAY. The Way referred to a life-style, a way to live as taught by Jesus Christ.

Remember in St. Matthews's Gospel, verse 28, at His Ascension, Christ gives the Great Commission:

"Go teach all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all I have commanded you, and I am with you always until the end of the world."

The Apostolic Church knew from the beginning that in their Sacramental life, they were born again of water and the Holy Spirit into a life lived now with Jesus Christ.

As Saint Paul would write to the Galatians, 2nd chapter, 19th verse:
"I live, no, it is not just I that live, Christ lives in me."

Early Christians were consistent in the practice of living with Christ who said:

"I am with you always, Even to the end of the world."

They would say:

- Quid Nunc Christus? – What are you saying to me NOW, O Christ
- Tu es Via! -- You are the Way
- Ostende Me Viam – Show me the Way!

In the First Reading from Romans, St. Paul, writing to the converts in Rome in his epistle to the Romans explains that –

You cannot live or be saved by observance of 613 laws, But you, by Baptism, can be brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is our Justice, justifying us by His death and resurrection, saving us from our sins, evil and death itself. It is being in this life with Christ that is the way we become free of sin and death.

This evening we gather here, but in spirit at the NEW SACRED LOCATION. The site preparation is almost complete. The foundations will be beginning. The new campus for Pope John Paul II Catholic High School is becoming a reality.

We are not building an alternative school. We are constructing a building that symbolizes what has already been created by Our Lord Jesus Christ – Our Life with Him.

The practice of the Spiritual Sacramental life, our Baptismal life, the Kingdom of God here on earth is the business of this High School.

Formation and development of the Catholic Way of life – life in Christ is the main mission and pillar of this enterprise. All other subjects – Academic, Arts, Athletics – flow from this major keystone, which controls the life of this school.

Yes, the reason for this school can be summarized in a word, in one person – Jesus Christ is the center of this Catholic High School.

And this is the difference! Catholic Education means and is all about the living dynamic presence of Jesus TODAY, communicating the meaning of living in Christ in the world today; for He said:

“I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

About a year and a half ago, in March 2008, Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI visited the United States for the first time as Pope.

Remember, he first visited Washington D.C. He was at the White House, then he met with the bishops of the United States, some 400 of them, in the crypt of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception; He met with Catholic Educators at Catholic University and an inter-faith group at the Pope John Paul II Center. The next day, he celebrated Mass at the new National Parks Stadium. Both Bishop Baker and I were there for all these events.

But then Bishop Baker had to return to Birmingham and go to work. I, being retired, could continue to travel with the Pope to New York.

In New York, he visited a Jewish Synagogue, met with young people and Seminarians, had Mass with Priests, religious Sisters, and Brothers at St Patrick’s Cathedral. Then he went to the darkest place in America – the site of the World Trade Center tragedy of 9/11. He knelt down and said aloud a beautiful prayer. At the end of the prayer, he stood up and in a strikingly symbolic gesture, he lit a Paschal Candle, the sign of the Risen Christ. Death does not have the final word. Christ lives and they live.

The Pope took New York by storm. Later, on Sunday afternoon, he had Mass in the old Yankee Stadium which would be torn down to make way for the new stadium. Babe Ruth hit many home runs there. It was called the House of Ruth because of his record home runs.

After the Pope left New York, the headlines the next morning in the "New York Daily News," in big, bold letters read:

"Pope hits home run in House of Ruth."

While he was in the United States, Pope Benedict spoke often of the dangers of Secularism – living life without God – never mentioning God – never considering Him or referring to God.

To the Assembly of Bishops at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, He said this:

"Perhaps America's brand of secularism poses a particular problem. It allows for professing belief in God and respects the public role of religion and churches, but at the same time, secularism can subtly reduce religious belief to a lowest common denominator. Faith becomes a passive acceptance that certain things 'out there' are true but without practical relevance for everyday life. The result is a growing separation of faith from life – living as if God does not exist."

The Pope went on to say that our Catholic Faith is not some vague abstract idea. "No", he says, "Faith is the criteria that determines our life-style – the way we live."

Because we believe in Jesus Christ, because we know we live with Him by Baptism and the Sacramental life – this truth guides us in the way we live and in the way we refuse to live.

Our American Culture presently is secular, without God. The Catholic Culture runs counter to what we experience around us.

We live with God. We live a life in Christ. It is our hope that the students who have already graduated from Pope John Paul II Catholic High School and those here and those to come will hold on to the WAY. Hold on to Jesus Christ.

Yes, I believe there is a new spiritual power spreading through our young people. They sense a deeper relationship with the Lord.

The Mass and Holy Communion is more meaningful to them. The life-style devotion to Jesus as The Way is a more determining factor in the life of these students and Alumni.

In this year for Priests and the coming 40th Anniversary of the Diocese of Birmingham, we reflect on Sacred Gift of Priesthood in bringing us the presence of Christ through the Sacraments.

The priest missionaries that came to Alabama from Ireland and now from India, together with religious orders and all the priests who have served in the Huntsville, Decatur, Madison areas have formed the Catholic Faith in the hearts of the people here. They have led the way in establishing successful parishes, schools, and now this new endeavor for Pope John Paul II Catholic High School. Their example and sacrifice inspires and insures what we attempt to build – to the glory and praise of God.

May Mary, who gave Jesus Christ to the world, thru her intercession, continue to make Him present – Our Way, Our Truth, and Our Life.

“O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in us and in these your students in the perfection of your ways and your truth, leading us all to happiness here and forever.” Amen.