

BACCALAUREATE LITURGY
24 MAY, 2019

*Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the way
and opened the scriptures to us?*



It's a funny thing about a school, and about every class: there's always those one or two kids...you know, the ones who are always late for class, the ones whose dogs always eat their homework or their alarm clocks or something, the ones whose computers always go on the fritz when the paper is due, the ones who forget their cleats, the ones who forget their sheet music, the ones who forget the meeting for the group project, the ones who don't have a #2 pencil on the day of a test, or who don't have their calculators, or who forgot to get their college applications in, or who forgot to get a haircut for the last 6 ½ weeks, or...you get the picture. You know...those ones. And I am sure there are one or two – only one or two, Mr. Rodriguez– in the class of 2019.

Well, you'll be happy to know that that's true of Jesuits too: there's always one or two. In fact, when St. Ignatius was putting together the *Compania de Jesus* – the Society of Jesus – with his friends

back in 1540, he had one or two. The King of Portugal asked for two guys to go to India to serve the Portuguese Catholic merchants there. Ignatius, who had never thought about Jesuits leaving Europe, saw the hand of God and the need of the Church in this, so he promptly appointed two of his brothers in Christ to report to Lisbon and board the first ship to Goa. Well, there's always one or two, and these guys both were them. One of them caught a cold or something and, of course, could *never* leave Europe; I think he had a cold for the next 50 years. The other made it to Lisbon, one of the most luxurious cities in the world, and...well, he really, really liked it there and wanted to stay there for the rest of his life.

There's an old saying: if you want something done, ask a busy person. So Ignatius did just that: he asked his best friend, Francis Xavier –the most competent, most engaged Jesuit he knew (He hadn't met Fr. Sauter yet) – to go to the very ends of the earth for the sake of the Gospel, even though he knew it meant he would probably never see this friend, this brother, again.

In the letter Ignatius gave to Francis Xavier, assigning him to this new mission, he ended with the words *Ite, inflammata omnia* – Go, set fire to the whole earth! And from then on, he used those same words with every one of his brothers whom he sent on mission.

Ite, inflammata omnia!

My brothers, this evening we begin the celebration of both your graduation and your commencement – the end of one part of your life and the beginning of another. And it's good – incredibly good – to celebrate this great moment with you, here in this chapel where your Prep life began four years ago at the Mass of the Holy Spirit. But it's also incredibly important to stop for a moment and reflect on how you got here before you move on to what comes next.

If you think about it, the story we just heard is a pretty good metaphor for your time at Prep. You've been on a road for years now some 17 or 18 years – a road where you have been accompanied by family first, and then playmates, and teachers, and especially these past four years by classmates and teammates and friends who have become brothers to you. And that's great! But let's be real honest: the road has

not always been easy or smooth. There's been challenges along the way. Some of the guys you started with are not here this evening; for one reason or other, they couldn't do it. And there's been failures along the way – failures in school, sure, but also failures at home, failures in friendship, personal failures. And there's been times when others – even friends and brothers – have failed you. There's been times when you've been disappointed –terribly disappointed – in family, in friends, even in yourself. Beyond the rose-colored glasses, it's important to be honest about these facts. Just like those two guys, trudging along that road from Jerusalem to Emmaus.

But here's the secret – the good news, so to speak: as hard as it has been, when there were disappointments in the classroom, or on the field, or on the stage – when you hit a bad note, or said the wrong thing, or lashed out, or sulked – things we've all done on this road – as hard as it has been, you have never been alone. There has always been that other who walked beside you – a friend, a coach, a teacher, your mom, your dad. And in their love for you, God's love has always been there.

Always. Always. And it has never depended on how good or perfect or

holy or pure you were. It has been there, walking beside you. On the way back to Boland after a dark day, on the way back to the locker room after a brutal practice, on the way off the court after a loss, on the way home after a miserable test, on the way up the aisle at Mr. Daum's wake – it has always been there, keeping the flame lit, nurturing the light and the warmth. I suspect there have been times when you felt like it has gone out, but something – someone – has always been there to rekindle it. There has always been a love there that has been greater than the challenge, greater than the hardship, greater than the disappointment. And that is why you have come to this day. There has always been a love there – a love greater than the obstacles.

Those disciples of Jesus knew disappointment. They wanted Jesus to be the one – they *so* wanted that. But they watched and saw him betrayed, and scourged, and powerless – literally nailed hand and foot to a cross. And they knew that they had failed him: they weren't there for him. And they had to admit that to themselves. And as they talked about those things on their road they became aware of one who walked beside them, one who heard their disappointment and their shame but

was not ashamed to walk with them, one who spoke a word of truth to them, one who lit their hearts on fire. And they didn't catch on at first, but suddenly they realized – it was a friend who walked with them, it was Jesus who walked with them, it was the love of God walking with them.

My brothers, you have been given a flame – a great love – in your hearts. I've seen it. It is a love for your friendship here, a love of teamsmanship and play, a love of collaboration on projects great and small and occasionally wonderfully goofy, a love of learning, a love of competition, a love of beauty in music and art, a love of personal excellence. Sure, you don't always live up to it – neither do I, or any of us here for that matter. But that is not the point. The point is to accept that love, that light, that flame, accept it now, and to take it with you.

Ignatius ended his missioning letter to his dearest friend and then to all those he missioned: *Ite, inflammata omnia!* – Go, set fire to the whole earth! Go, do great things! Go, and make a difference! Go, and give that same fire to others! Do not stay, but go. Go to the very ends of the earth. Go to the places no one else will go to. Go to the people no

one else will care for. Go do the good things – the necessary things – that no one else will do. Go and do not be afraid. You will never be alone in this. His friend – his brother – Francis Xavier, did go — to India, to the East Indies, to Borneo, to Indonesia, to Guangzhou, and to Japan. In the course of his journeys he baptized tens of thousands of people and learned native languages in order to teach and preach to people in their native tongue. And so did those other brother Jesuits – to Asia, to North and South and Central America. Indeed, some of them even came to the colony of Maryland where they started a school that eventually became the Academy on the Potomac, Georgetown Prep.

My brothers, tonight and tomorrow we celebrate the completion of your time here and the beginning of what comes next. Please always remember that you have been loved here – by your families first, by teachers and coaches, by friends and brothers. Carry the warmth and the light of that love with you as you leave. Be generous with it; don't be stingy! And *Ite, inflammata omnia!*



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