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5-26-2016

# 2016 Baccalaureate Mass Homily

William R. Campbell S.J.  
*College of the Holy Cross*

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### Recommended Citation

Campbell, William R. S.J., "2016 Baccalaureate Mass Homily" (2016). *Baccalaureate Mass Homilies*. 3.  
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# Baccalaureate Mass Homily

Thursday, May 26, 2016

Rev. William R. Campbell, S.J. '87

1 Peter 2:2-5, 9-12/ Psalm 100/ Mark 10:46-52



“So, what do you want to be when you grow up?”

When I was a kid, I hated being asked that question. Truth be told, I still don't like it. It's an earnest and straight-forward question. It isn't designed as a “trap” or a “gotcha question” that a smug reporter might ask a candidate for political office. It's direct in its aim, and it seeks a direct reply. And yet, when that question is asked of me, this is the question I actually hear being asked: “Are you aware of and in touch with and claimed by the deepest longings and yearnings and passions and desires that stir vitally within your very being?”

Who wouldn't feel intimidated by that question?

Well, apparently, the blind man Bartimaeus!

“What do you want me to do for you?” “Master, I want to see.”

Desire is easily mocked for being either selfish (as in “I want”) or salacious (as in “I lust”). Yet, desire fuels us on to greater moments, moments that motivate and reward, liberate and transform. But, when we don't name and claim the deepest desires within us, we will struggle to achieve the wholeness God desires for us, instead, likely wandering aimlessly from one temporary “next best thing” to another. Understanding our own desires, and accepting the desires God has for us, is key to discovering who we are and what we can be.

And yes, God has desires for us. In her recent collection of essays entitled *The Givenness of Things*, the Pulitzer Prize winning novelist Marilynne Robinson puts it this way: “I hope I will not sound eccentric when I say that God's love for the world is something it is also useful to ponder.” (An aside: this collection of essays is a beautiful literary “valentine” to the power and potential of a liberal arts education. Add it to your summer reading list.)

The story of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, illustrates well this dynamic of coming to name and know my desires as God's desires for me. His story is, hopefully, familiar to many of us. But, allow me to recall one chapter of that story.

An ambitious man of court, Ignatius suffered a cannon ball slicing through his legs while he was defending a fortress for his King. That near-mortal moment was followed by a lengthy period of convalescence that confined him to a bed in his family's castle. To pass the time, he read the only books that were at hand: biographies of some saints and a biography of Jesus Christ.

And, he daydreamed. First, he daydreamed that he was a knight in shining armor doing deeds for his own sake, and then he daydreamed that he was like one of the holy men and women about whom he was reading, doing great deeds for the sake of others, helping to build up the kingdom of God in the lives of those around him.

He noticed his moods after each daydream. He soon realized the daydreams that featured him seeking his own fame ultimately left his inner spirits feeling unsettled and empty, whereas the daydreams in which he fancied himself doing deeds for the sake of others filled his inner spirit with a lasting peace. Eventually, he would come to make decisions informed by his awareness of these interior dispositions. He would place before God the choices at hand, imagine himself within each one, and then opt for that choice which, after prayerful consideration, left him most at peace, recognizing that inner peace as a gift from God. In other words: Ignatius learned how to name and calibrate his desires with the desires that God, through the world, had for him.

Our tradition calls this practice discernment. Because we tend to be “results-oriented” people, we easily focus on the end result of any discernment: “What is the decision I am to make? Choice A or Choice B?” But we can only tend well to the end of the process if we have tended well to its beginning, a moment which asks us to know, name and claim the desires within us.

We are easily blocked from doing this. There is insecurity that we will be mocked: “Many rebuked Bartimaeus and told him to be silent.” There is fatigue from failure: “Bartimaeus kept calling out all the more.” There is resentment that previously expressed desires have been, seemingly, ignored: “He kept calling out all the more: Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me.”

Yet, undaunted and with confidence, Bartimaeus, when his moment arrives, speaks his deepest desire. He does not hesitate or equivocate; he is candid and direct: “What do you want me to do for you?” “Master, I want to see.”

Four years ago, you members of the Class of 2016 enrolled at the College of the Holy Cross. You arrived on Mt. St. James with not just the practicalities of laundry baskets and laptops in hand but also with desires in your hearts for yourselves and for the world.

And this world, well, at least this community of learning and faith that we call the College of the Holy Cross, held desires for you. We desired you to dialogue about basic human questions. We desired you to be open to the challenges of new ideas. We desired you to be patient with ambiguity and uncertainty. We desired you to combine a passion for truth with respect for the views of others. And we desired you to do so while appropriating our Catholic, Jesuit and liberal arts commitment to the intellectual life, to the service of faith and to the promotion of justice.

Some years ago, the then-Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., delivered a speech at Santa Clara University in which he made this bold claim: "The measure of Jesuit universities is not what our students do but who they become and the adult Christian responsibility they will exercise in future towards their neighbor and their world." So that no one missed his point, he restated it in these succinct words: "The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become."

That real measure of our success will be the God-infused trajectory of your desires.

"So, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

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College of the Holy Cross • 1 College Street, Worcester, MA 01610 • 508-793-2011

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