

Epistle: Revelation 17: 12-14  
Gospel: John 16: 12-20

(Sermon delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Baccalaureate Mass, Notre Dame, Indiana, Saturday, May 22, 1971)

The Epistle today reminds us that, while this day is a special point in history for each of you, a completion of what is past and a commencement of what is yet to come, God for each of us extends across the whole spectrum of our lives as the Alpha and Omega (A to Z for those who never studied Greek), the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Somehow, God presided mysteriously over those first moments of our human existence and He will be with us at the end, as during all the days in between -- whether we notice His Presence or not. St. John also assures us that the award, at the end, as today, will be what we have deserved.

If the Epistle had included the next verse that follows this, you would have had a warning -- that while some will in reward enter the Eternal City, others must stay outside, and they are listed: "dogs, fortune-tellers, and fornicators, and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone of false speech and false life".

It is a curious list -- the dogs must be sons of you know what; the fortune-tellers I leave to your imagination, although I suspect they are those who predict a great future for you -- with little effort on your part; the fornicators are those who have not learned how to distinguish between selfish sensuality and true love; the murderers, those who follow Cain and his works of violence; the idolaters, those who confuse God with a whole variety of created goods that they variously worship -- money, power, pleasure, whatever, -- and, lastly, everyone of false speech and false life.

This latter category is made up of all those whose life is ruled by something other than integrity and conscience. Here, I am moved to quote to you the words of Sir Winston Churchill that I have addressed to long generations of Notre Dame graduates:

"The only guide to a man is his conscience:  
the only shield to his memory is the rectitude  
and sincerity of his actions: It is very imprudent  
to walk through life without this shield, because  
we are so mocked by the failure of our hopes; but  
with this shield (of conscience), whatever our  
destiny may be, we always march in the ranks of  
honor."

Today is, among other things, a day of judgment, not last, but intermediate judgment. May you all be as successful in the final judgment on your lives which will be so much more revealing and more important than today's judgment which is transitory and temporal, while the final judgment will be ultimate and eternal.

Now to the Gospel which is full of joy and hope for those who have ears to hear. Our Saviour is having a final word with His followers at the Last Supper, which we commemorate here in the Mass. We are part of that small group around the table, if we truly follow Christ, Our Saviour, as they did down those long dusty roads of Judea and Galilee. He assures us that He has lost none except Judas who chose to be lost. He wants to share eternal joy with us who follow Him, even though the world may hate us for

following Him. He does not want us, for all that, to remove ourselves from the world, but to live in the world with faith and honor and in truth -- which is His word. In fact, He tells us, most appropriately for today, that we are being sent into the world, consecrated in truth. He prays not only for us -- who will find this life in truth -- the opposite of those the Epistle condemned for false words and false life -- but Our Saviour prays as well for those in the world who through us will find the truth, as they see our lives which reflect His truth, the truth of those who have faith in Christ, Our Lord.

He commits to us who follow Him and His message the task of creating unity in a divided world -- the unity of love, love of God for us, love of each of us for the other. He also speaks of the Christian life lived in faith and love, and hope, too. Finally, He tells us that He will be with us all the way, which is our pledge of strength and love shared, and of the glory to come.

You may at this moment judge yourself unworthy, or even unprepared for this difficult undertaking. Some may even be uninterested in taking part. But the invitation is always there, the spiritual battle is already joined in your own life and in the world that lies ahead for each of you. There are no conscientious objectors in this encounter -- only those who live their life in Christ and those who reject it to their own eternal

peril. You are perfectly free to follow either path, but not free to avoid the consequences of your decision.

The days ahead will have their lessons for each of you, some joyfully learned, like lessons of love, and some that will etch your very souls with the strong acid of sorrow and adversity. We trust that the values you have seen or learned here at Notre Dame will sustain you in adversity: the joy of seeing the truth, the exhilaration of beauty, the innate strength of goodness, the passion for justice in our times, the quiet courage born of prayer, the love and compassion we owe all humans who suffer, the competence and commitment to do something to bring a better world to birth, the modesty and humility that our human frailty dictates, the respect we owe to all things truly human, sensitivity to spiritual realities, sorrow for our sins, and hope for God's mercy, in a word, salvation, ours and the world's.

Our hope and prayer for each of you today is that all of these great intellectual and moral qualities will deepen their roots in your life and grow through all the days given to each of you, wherever you may be, whatever you may do, to enrich each of you as a person born and nourished in faith, to add luminosity to your lives in a world often sunken in darkness.

The final word of Christ, Our Saviour, was to promise His Spirit to each of you. If I might speak in the person of Christ to each of you this day, may I suggest that whatever your present

spiritual weakness or strength as you face the future -- most of the original disciples were very weak -- you remember in the days ahead how to cry for help when you need it. It is a simple prayer -- three words -- but it calls on the final promise of Our Lord: Come Holy Spirit. Call, and He will come, and, with Him, you will not fail whatever the odds -- which is good Notre Dame language.

My own personal assessment is that the odds are going to be fairly formidable in the years ahead for all of us. The fortune-tellers mentioned above will be promising you easy salvation, with a minimum of discipline, sacrifice, and tough moral decision in your personal life. Salvation never was easy, nor is the true pursuit of happiness and inner peace -- both of which are not unrelated to salvation. St. Paul puts it bluntly -- as you sow, so shall you reap. Sow in the flesh and you reap corruption. Sow in the spirit and you reap life everlasting. And remember God is not mocked, least of all by His free and intelligent creatures.

The odds do not only bear on our personal life and salvation -- the difficult daily call to personal honor and integrity -- but we will live increasingly in institutions, civil, religious, familial, that are rocked by rapid and, at times, cataclysmic change. We cannot for long resign from the human race and all human institutions. Nor should we. It is a far better strategy to work for constructive institutional

changes that are responsive to the good winds of renewal that sweep the modern world. We have had enough of apathy and cynicism -- turning-off and copping-out in your idiom. My advice for you is to turn to and cope.

In all of this personal and social endeavor that lies ahead of you, the Holy Spirit, for Whom we yearn again during this season, as did the disciples in the upper room, is still our best assurance of wisdom, vision, and courage, inspiring the true kind of personal conscience that seeks first the Kingdom of God and His justice, not our personal whim and convenience. Come Holy Spirit.

We watch you go forward with deep pride and true affection -- May Our Blessed Mother, Notre Dame, bless you always with Her wonderful Child.

(Remarks made by Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Commencement Exercises)

The time has come, at long last you may think, to say to all of you who go forth a word of parting on behalf of all those who remain behind. That we wish you God's blessing in the days ahead goes almost without saying, as indeed we do, from the heart.

The days ahead will also have their lessons, some easily and joyfully learned, and some that will etch your very souls in the strong acid of sorrow and adversity. We trust that the values you have learned here: the joy of truth, the exhilaration of beauty, the strength of goodness, the passion for justice, the quiet courage born of prayer, the love and compassion we owe our fellow men, the modesty and humility that our human frailty dictates, reverence for the inner dignity of all things truly human -- we trust that all of these intellectual and moral qualities will take deeper root and grow in you throughout all the days ahead, to enrich you as a person and to add luminosity to your life in a world often dark.

And because you have been schooled in the moral as well as the intellectual dimension of life's total meaning, I give you as a parting thought these brief words of Winston Churchill:

"The only guide to a man is his conscience: the only shield to his memory is the rectitude and sincerity of his actions. It is very imprudent to walk through life without this shield, because we are so mocked by the failure of

our hopes; but with this shield, whatever our destiny  
may be, we always march in the ranks of honor."

May Our Blessed Lady, Notre Dame, bless you ever with Her  
Divine Son -- and may each of you ever be a true son of Notre Dame.