

(Homily delivered by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President, University of Notre Dame, at the Opening Mass of the School Year, Sacred Heart Church, Sunday, September 11, 1977)

Each new academic year begins in a burst of hope, shared by faculty and students alike, that a new time of inner growth is at hand, awaiting all the subtle influences of the educational process. No matter how long one has been at it, there is each September a new spirit in the air, an undercurrent of excitement, a sense of high purpose renewed.

It is no different today as we offer Mass again at the beginning of our 136th year, to ask God's inspiration and blessing on our faculty and students and on this University of Notre Dame, in which the new academic year will unfold, hopefully, in grace and splendor and growth through the brisk and brightly colored Fall, through the quiet reflective starkness of Winter, and into the glory of new life burgeoning all about us in the Springtime to come.

We begin again in prayer and confidence -- perhaps better said, confident because we pray.

To whom do we pray? Each one of you must speak for yourself, but I am willing to expose myself, as perhaps I should, standing here before so many colleagues whose lives, like my own, have been so intimately linked over so many years in this noble endeavor called Catholic higher education.

To whom do we pray today? It is easiest just to say that we pray to God. For a child, it is easy to visualize an anthropomorphic

Father, by which name God is most easily called, as indeed Jesus addressed Him in the prayer He taught us. As we grow older and are introduced to the true wonder of the Christmas Story, the splendor of God-made-man who dwelt among us, prayer comes quite congenially to address Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior, whose birth brought divinity visibly among us, whose life and the good news He proclaimed touches our lives at so many focal points, whose suffering, death, and resurrection, daily commemorated in the Holy Mass, give redemptive meaning to our suffering and death and the hope of ultimate resurrection to eternal life. "I am the way, the truth and the life Who lives and believes in Me has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day."

In my own life, as I grew older still, there came a further trinitarian progression to prayer and the God whom we so falteringly address. God is not only Father and Son, but Holy Spirit as well. The sweep of revelation from Genesis, "Let there be light" to John's "And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and of His fullness we have all received," did not end there. Over the years, I have been increasingly seized by the intimate words of Jesus to His beloved few, the night before He died. Let me repeat a few of those words from John's account of the Last Supper:

"My little children, I will not be with you much longer.

I give you a new commandment: Love one another, just as

I have loved you, you must love one another. By this

love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples." (XIII, 33-35)

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in Me." (XIV, 1)

"Whatsoever you ask for in My name, I will do it I shall ask the Father and He will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows Him; but you know Him, because He is with you, He is in you. I will not leave you orphans."
(XIV, 13-18)

"I have said these words to you, while still with you; but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you." (XIV, 25-26)

Christmas is ever heartwarming and tender. Easter is full of joy and hope. But at Pentecost, Christianity really began in earnest. Poor, inadequate men and women, adrift and afraid and seemingly hopeless, suddenly received the fire of the Holy Spirit and went out to cast the fire of the good news all across the world. Until today, when over a billion men and women call themselves Christian.

It is not my point this morning to trace the work of the Spirit over these two millenia from Pentecost until now, but to emphasize that the Christian work that brings all of us together, at this time and in this place, is indeed a pre-eminent work of the

Spirit. I might also add that those of us whose whole lives are given to the work of education might best pray today to the Holy Spirit, for the gifts He gives are those we need most for the success of our work. I will only mention the two gifts for which I pray most often, for myself and for each of you.

First, wisdom. The first time that I preached on this occasion, for the 111th school year beginning in 1952, I preached on education and wisdom. I seek wisdom no less today. Throughout scripture, wisdom is imaged as light. Even Our Lord said, "I am the Light of the world" and St. John says "that (His) life was the light of men, a light that shines in the darkness, a light that darkness could not overpower." (John I, 4-5)

Our most basic task as educators in a world of darkness is to be bearers of the light of truth and wisdom. We and our students live in a world of darkness where physical and material power is mainly cherished: In the macro-world, the power of wealth, the power of military might, the power of political clout, the power of vast communication empires, the power of enormous industrial enterprises. In the micro-world, the power of the atom, DNA, the gene, the virus, the neutron, the thermo-nuclear reaction. None of these powers is evil of itself, only in its use, which often enough through human malevolence contributes to the power of darkness.

Against all of this physical power, we say to our students, I hope we do, that there is a primacy of the spiritual, that action

is both useless and dangerous without prior thought, that the greater the physical power available, the greater the need for spiritual values that must control its use. Man cannot live humanly or even survive in a world of darkness without the light of wisdom. Those of us who presume to teach young people to live and cope in such a world of wild and unruly and enticing power must most of all be endowed with the wisdom that orders all knowledge and power towards the good of mankind, peace, and the glory of God, too.

No one has to argue to this assembly that the university is and must increasingly be the House of the Intellect. But we do humbly pray today that our intellects are not merely filled with knowledge, for knowledge without wisdom can lead to blind pride and darkness. We were recently led into a dark abyss in Vietnam by the best and the brightest, who were competent and learned, but not wise.

We pray ^{to be} to be wise men and women who see a wholeness and an order and a meaning to life and to humanity's total quest for light in the surrounding darkness. We pray to be modest and humble about what we know because there is so much that we do not know, so much that only faith can illumine. We also pray to be wise in time, so that one day we might enjoy, and lead others to enjoy, the light of God's vision in eternity, for without the promise of eternal life, this life can be a cruel hoax, a mad tragedy.

Wisdom makes the difference. There is a marvelous description of wisdom in the Old Testament's Book of Wisdom:

"She is a breath of the Power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty She is a reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God's active power, image of His goodness she makes all things new. In each generation, she passes into holy souls, she makes them friends of God and prophets, for God loves only the man who lives with wisdom." (Wisdom VII, 25-27)

Negatively, Wisdom says, "Wretched are those who scorn wisdom and disciplines: their hope is void, their toil unavailing, their achievements unprofitable." (Wisdom III, 11)

Let us pray today that wisdom may be the fulfillment of our learning, the substance of our teaching, the light of our lives in this Seat of Wisdom, which is another name of Notre Dame, Our Lady.

The second gift of the Holy Spirit that I would like to pray for today is courage. This may seem a somewhat pedestrian request after wisdom, but I think not. Why do educators need courage, especially today? First, because there is so much counterfeit education going on today, both formally and informally, that it takes a courageous person to stand firm and breast the rising tide of pragmatism, incompetence, foolishness, and valuelessness that is, all around us, passing for education.

Too many educators are afraid to say that whatever we teach students to do, it is even more important to teach them what kind of

persons they should be. This means that they must be taught values as well as skills, and we must teach the values by courageously exemplifying them. It takes courage to say that there is no easy path to truth, and competence, and wisdom, and that each of these ~~are~~^{is} far more important than false, but easy victories, moral ambiguity or neutrality, and cunning deceit in life. Robert Hutchins in 1935 courageously told his graduates: "Believe me, you are closer to the truth now than you will ever be again. Do not let 'practical' men tell you that you should surrender your ideals because they are impractical. Do not be reconciled to dishonesty, indecency, and brutality because gentlemanly ways have been discovered to be dishonest, indecent, and brutal courage, temperance, liberality, honor, justice, wisdom, reason and understanding, these are still the virtues." He added thirty years later: "The life of man, so far as it is of value at all, is at every point a struggle of wisdom against folly, of generosity against selfishness, of objectivity against prejudice, of civilization against barbarism."

In a world where so few of us can glory in freedom, it takes courage to use our freedom to promote justice, even when justice is unpopular; to reject falsehood when everyone else says that the naked emperor is well clothed; to unmask the shoddy, the superficial, and the ersatz when others are applauding it because it happens to be in vogue.

Courage is most important for educators because courage makes our inner integrity viable and our students learn integrity best when they see us practice it courageously. Courage brings wisdom out of our inner being and makes it visible in the way we judge life's options and how faithfully we follow those paths that we judge best, even though difficult. Every good value we hold requires steadfast courage, so does every good initiative, every faithful act, every generous deed.

I spent a week at Aspen last month leading an Executive Seminar on the Nature of Man. After sampling the classical Chinese, Greek, Roman, Medieval, Renaissance and modern texts, after more than twenty hours of discussion, one strong conviction, an old one for me, came through to all with startling clarity -- whatever one thinks of man's and woman's potential goodness, there is something more that we all desperately need to be good: the enlightenment of wisdom and the strength of courage, both born of faith and prayer.

It is in that faith and with that prayer that I call upon the Holy Spirit today, as we begin once again with hope and joy and confidence to take part together in this noble and creative work that we call education. May the Holy Spirit grant us all, wisdom and courage, the light to see and the strength to do, and may He likewise illumine and strengthen our students, too.

I conclude with an English version of my favorite Pentecostal hymn, Veni Sancte Spiritus, Come Holy Spirit, ascribed to Stephen Langton, who was born in the year 1150 and died in 1228.

Holy Spirit, God of light,
Fill us with your radiance bright;
Gentle father of the poor,
Make us, by your help, secure;
Come, your boundless grace impart,
Bring your love to ev'ry heart.
Lord of consolation, come,
Warm us when our hearts are numb;
Great consoler, come and heal,
To our souls your strength reveal;
Cool, refreshing comfort pour,
And our peace of mind restore.
Light immortal, fire divine,
With your love our hearts refine;
Come, our inmost being fill,
Make us all to do your will;
Goodness you alone can give,
Grant that in your grace we live.
Come, our lukewarm hearts inspire,
Mold our wills to your desire;
In our weakness make us strong,
And amend our every wrong;
Guide us when we go astray,
Wash our stain of guilt away.

Give to ev'ry faithful soul
Gifts of grace to make us whole;
Help us when we come to die,
So that we may live on high;
Ever let your love descend,
Give us joys that never end.