



Homily – Baccalaureate Mass, Cathedral High Schoolⁱ

*The Most Rev. José H. Gomez
Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels
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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and especially you, my young brothers who are graduating from this great Catholic high school:

I want to say again how happy I am to be here to celebrate this holy Mass with you.

In this holy Eucharist, let us thank God for all of his blessings in your lives — especially for the blessings of your families; for the gift of your faith in Jesus Christ; and for the blessings of your Catholic education.

Also in this Eucharist, I want to ask special blessings for each of you, as you step out to continue your journey of faith in the world.

The readings we have just heard give you good wisdom for your journey.

In the first reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we see the apostles providing instruction for how people should live their Christian faith in the world.

They teach the people two things: Stay free from *idols* and from *unchastity* or “unlawful marriage.” In other words, love and worship only the one true God and be faithful to God’s moral values for the human person. Live according to God’s plan for the human person, created in his image and likeness!

Even 2,000 years later that’s pretty good advice for you also, my young brothers.

You are entering into a world filled with idols and temptations and challenges to your faith. What is an *idol*? An idol is anything that we set up in our lives as something we worship instead of God.

We all know the TV show, *American Idol*. It’s a good show. There are a lot of talented people who come on it to perform. But it tells us something about our culture.

In our culture, we make entertainers, athletes, and celebrities into *idols*. We make them into people we think about and talk about a lot. And we try to *imitate* our idols. We want to wear the same clothes and do the same things they do.

We have to be careful about this!

We all love music and movies and sports. And all that is good. *God gives us every good thing!* He wants us to love this life he has given to us as a gift and to live our lives beautifully!

We have to watch out that these things we enjoy — sports, entertainments — we have to watch out that they don't get in the way of our love for God and our following of Jesus Christ. We have to make sure that we don't turn these things into *idols*.

The apostles also teach us this evening that there is a set of moral values that we are called to live by.

The world you are entering into has strange attitudes about morality: God's plan for the human person and how we are supposed to relate to each other. No commitments, no rules. No moral truth.

Remember that your behavior and your relationships must be rooted in God's plan for creation and the human person. Life, death, public life, community, the economy, the environment — all are elements of our lives that must be seen and lived according to God's plan.

In everything, my young brothers: It is up to you now to decide how you are going to live. You already know the right answer. You learned it in your high school.

That's why a Catholic education is so important. It teaches you to live as children of God and as persons of faith. It gives you opportunities for spiritual growth through the liturgy and the sacraments. It teaches you the truths of your faith and how to live them in your daily lives.

It can be a tough world sometimes. So you have to stay true, my brothers. True to who you are. True to who God made you to be.

Stay close to Jesus Christ. *Always!* He is *near!* Closer than the air you breathe! He wants to walk with you. He never leaves us alone.

I pray that you will try to know Jesus better and better every day. Talk to him a lot in prayer. Read his words and learn about his life in the Gospels.

And always follow the teaching of his apostles. You still have their teaching in the Scriptures and in our Catholic Church. The apostles' teaching is in the *Catechism*. It is in the words of the bishops and our Holy Father, the Pope.

The apostles say in tonight's reading: "It is the decision of *the Holy Spirit and of us.*" That's still true! What the Church teaches comes from God. From the Holy Spirit.

Only these teachings will lead you to find happiness and God's will for your lives.

In the Gospel this evening, Jesus says he has *chosen* you, my young brothers. You are not his slaves. He calls you his *friends*.

You are created for a reason. *God loves each one of you very dearly* — as if there were no one else in the whole wide world but you. God has a plan for each one of your lives.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel this evening that God wants us to *bear fruits* for him. Fruits of love.

He calls us to love with the same love that God has shown to us. *Love as I have loved you!* We have to imitate Jesus Christ — in our thoughts and attitudes; in our actions and words.

Try to do everything for love, my brothers. For the love of God! For the love of your family and the love of your neighbors.

You have a responsibility now to play your part in God's plan for the world. He created this world to be a great city of love and truth, a culture of life. By your love you must spread God's love.

This is your mission: *To love* until every life is welcomed and cherished — from the child in the womb to the old and handicapped, to the immigrant seeking a new life for his family. *To love* until in this world *no one is a stranger to love*.

This is how the saints live. They live by love. And Jesus is calling you, my brothers, to follow him and to be saints.

Before we continue with this holy Eucharist, I want to tell you the story of one of my favorite saints. He is a reminder that no one is too young to love as Jesus loved.

Blessed José Sánchez del Rio was an ordinary Catholic young man who lived in Guadalajara during the 1920s, when Mexico's government was persecuting the Church.

At 13, Blessed José joined the Cristeros resistance movement that was fighting against the government's repression of the faith.

The government forces captured him. They tortured him, trying to get him to renounce his faith. He refused over and over again. Finally, they sheered the skin off the soles of his feet, and made him walk to the cemetery. There they shot him dead.

He was 15 years old.

While he was in jail, Blessed José wrote to his mother, trying to comfort her.

“To die for God gives me joy,” he wrote. “I send greetings to my brothers and ask them to always follow the smallest wish of God.”ⁱⁱ

This is how we are all called to live. With a love like Blessed José Sánchez. With a love that does everything to follow even the smallest wish of God for our lives.

So that is my prayer for you, my young brothers. That you live by love. Make your lives something beautiful that you offer to God!

I ask God’s blessings upon you on this joyous day for you. And may Mary our Blessed Mother, the Seat of Wisdom, be your guide as you seek to use wisely the education you have received to be leaders in our society and faithful disciples of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

ⁱ Readings (Friday, 5th Week of Easter): Acts 15:22–31; John 15:12–17.

ⁱⁱ Cruz, Sainly Youth of Modern Times (Our Sunday Visitor, 2006), 118.