

Homily for the Boston College Mass of the Holy Spirit
 September 15, 2011
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Joel 2:23a, 26-3:1-3a
 1 Cor. 12:4-13
 John 14:23-26

The gift of the Holy Spirit poured out upon us works wonders in our midst and shapes our vision of the world. So says the prophet Joel in today's first reading. Jesus in the Gospel promises us that the gift of God's Spirit, God's life dwelling within us, will teach us all things. That promise calls us to see the world in a particular way. The Spirit invites us to see God present and at work in all things, transforming us, working wonders among us, shaping us with all our diverse gifts and talents into one body, and enabling all of our gifts and talents, all that we do here at Boston College, to contribute to the wholeness and fullness of life that God desires for us and our world. That is what we have come here to celebrate this day.

A couple of weeks ago, I had the opportunity to tell the new first-year students at the Law School a bit about the Jesuit tradition in education. I suggested to them that the reality that makes Jesuit education distinctive is the spirituality that gives life to this university.¹ That spirituality is grounded in the conviction that God is at work in the depths of all things.² Since the time of St. Ignatius, Jesuits have tried to help people to see the world as a place in which God is always and everywhere at work, laboring to bring all people and all of creation to experience freedom, wholeness, and fullness of life.

If this is true, then God is laboring in the life and work of this university; God is at work in the midst of our study and teaching and research in every discipline to which our questioning human minds apply themselves. Because God dwells in all things and labors in all things, we Jesuits and this university are committed to the notion that "there is no reality that is only profane for those who know how to look."³ Because we see the world in this way, we are convinced that there can be a holiness to all the things we do every day in our classrooms and libraries and laboratories across this campus. We can encounter God in all these things. As we pursue the truth in whatever areas of study engage us; as we try to answer questions about what it means to live a good human life and what it might take to build a world characterized by justice and reconciliation; as we open our minds and hearts in wonder to the complexity and beauty of the world around us; in all these things we are encountering the God who labors in all things to bring all people and all of creation to experience the freedom and wholeness and fullness of life that God passionately desires for all that God has lovingly brought into being.

At a conference of Jesuit educators from around the world in Mexico City in April 2010, Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, voiced his concern about what

¹ See, e.g., MICHAEL J. BUCKLEY, S.J., *THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY AS PROMISE AND PROJECT: REFLECTIONS IN A JESUIT IDIOM* 18, 81 (1998).

² *Id.* at 82-84 (discussing the "religious density" of all things).

³ General Congregation 35 of the Society of Jesus, Decree 2, "A Fire That Kindles Other Fires," #10 (2008); see also BUCKLEY, *supra* note 1, at 84 ("Nothing is finally profane.")

he called the globalization of superficiality.⁴ He noted that we have quick access to all kinds of information, but we often avoid the “laborious, painstaking work of serious, critical thinking.” In a world of pervasive social media, where we “friend” and “unfriend” one another with ease, Fr. Nicolas fears that our relationships and our thinking can be characterized by a lazy superficiality. We can fail to engage in what he calls “the hard work of forming communities of dialogue in search of truth and understanding.” As a result, our thoughts, our visions, our dreaming and desiring and imagining, our perception of reality, our relationships and convictions, can all remain shallow. This shallowness diminishes our flourishing as human persons, and it limits our ability to respond to a world in need of healing intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

In the face of this globalization of superficiality, Fr. Nicolas challenged Jesuit universities around the world to promote in creative new ways the depth of thought and imagination that are distinguishing marks of the Jesuit educational tradition. Fr. Nicolas suggested that this depth of thought and imagination have their foundation in a particular way of seeing the world. The depth of thought and imagination to which he calls us involve “a profound engagement with the real, a refusal to let go until one goes beneath the surface” of things. In the words of Fr. Nicolas, it involves “careful analysis” for the sake of integration around what is deepest: God, Christ, the Gospel. He explains that the starting point for this integration will always be what is real, the world that we encounter in all the things that we study in the life of the university, “the world of the senses so vividly described in the Gospels themselves; a world of suffering and need, a broken world with many broken people in need of healing. We start there. We don’t run away from there. And then Ignatius guides [all of us engaged in the life of the university] to enter into the depths of that reality. Beyond what can be perceived most immediately, [Ignatius] leads [us] to see the hidden presence and action of God in what is seen, touched, smelt, felt. And that encounter with what is deepest changes [us.]”

When the Spirit enables us to see the world in the way that Fr. Nicolas describes, we are changed. With this depth of vision, we are able to recognize God already at work in our world, healing and reconciling and loving. The depth of thought and imagination to which Fr. Nicolas calls us enable us to integrate intellectual rigor with reflection on experience and creative imagination so that we might work alongside our laboring God in constructing a world that is more humane, more just, and more faith-filled.

Much of this often remains implicit and unsaid in the midst of all the hard and important work that goes on here in the various dimensions of the life of this university every day. But we have all gathered here for Mass in the middle of a class day in order to give explicit witness to that conviction.⁵ Our presence here today gives explicit witness to our conviction that the life of faith and the intellectual life are not two radically separate realms. As the prophet Joel reminds

⁴ See Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., *Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today*, in AJCU, *Shaping the Future: Networking Jesuit Higher Education for a Globalizing World* (Report of the Mexico Conference, April 2010, Frank Brennan, S.J., ed.), at 9. The quotations that follow come from pp. 9-13 of Fr. Nicolas’s address.

⁵ See JOHN C. HAUGHEY, S.J., *WHERE IS KNOWING GOING? THE HORIZONS OF THE KNOWING SUBJECT* 124 (2009) (“A campus’s Eucharistic liturgy . . . should make explicit what it believes Christ is seeking to accomplish in that particular academy at that particular time.”).

us, the gift of God's transforming Spirit shapes our hearts and sharpens our vision so that we can more clearly see the wonder of God alive in our midst, enlivening our dreaming and our imagining so that the daily work of our lives in the university can more and more cooperate with all that God is doing in our world. And as St. Paul reminds us, the gift of God's Spirit present and at work in this Eucharist draws us all together, making use of all the different activities that characterize our labors in the life of the university, transforming us and shaping us into the wholeness that the eyes of faith recognize as the body of Christ.

In a few minutes, gifts of bread and wine will be brought forward to the altar to be offered to God in gratitude for all the gifts of our lives. As we together offer the church's great Eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving, God's Spirit will transform those ordinary gifts of bread and wine so that they might become for us the body and blood of Christ. The Spirit trains our vision to recognize the hidden presence of God in what is seen, touched, smelt, felt, and tasted. At this university Eucharist, let's join all the gifts of our lives here at Boston College to those gifts of bread and wine.⁶ And let's bring to the altar to be offered to God along with those gifts, all of the work of our hands and our minds, all the fruits of our academic labor, all that we do in our classrooms and libraries, in our laboratories and legal clinics, in our residence halls and administrative offices and athletic fields. Let's prepare all of those gifts to be transformed along with the bread and the wine we offer today. May God's Spirit at work in this Eucharist teach us and transform us, giving us the depth of thought and creative imagination that we so much need in a world that can often be satisfied with superficiality. Enlivened by those gifts of the Spirit, may we recognize the God who is always already laboring alongside us in the life and work of this university, inviting us to cooperate in his work of bringing the world to the freedom, wholeness, and fullness of life that God desires for all of us and for our whole world.

⁶ See *id.* at 123-29 (discussing worship and the Catholic identity of the campus).