

June 6, 2008  
Msgr. Peter J. Vaghi

With greatest joy and happiness, our graduation class gathers as a parish and as a school community with Father Woods, our wonderful sisters, teachers, our honored speaker Judge Leon, parents, relatives and friends, to celebrate-- in the context of this holy Mass—the 52nd graduation of Little Flower School. And how providential it is that you graduate, my dear graduates, in a year marked by the recent historic and most successful visit to our Nation and city of the Vicar of Christ, Pope Benedict XVI!

You were well prepared for his visit as Little Flower students, theologically and personally. So many of you experienced his arrival close up on that beautiful afternoon at the Vatican Embassy, or the next day at the Nationals Stadium or by watching him on television. You listened to his words and were blessed, as was the entire world, by his presence and genuine love, so evident especially his love for young people like yourselves. He honored us by his visit with us.

Now it is your turn, dear graduates, to honor him by your visit in our world, the next step in a world prepared for you, most particularly the world of high school and new friends. From your studies at Little Flower school, you are well prepared educationally for this new adventure in your lives. For you visit this new world not alone, but with Christ Jesus and with a renewed faith in Him as each of us was confirmed in our faith by the Pope's visit.

As followers of Jesus, we never walk alone and never in fear. In the words of that great Jewish prophet Jeremiah, from our first reading, I have “plans to give you a future full of hope.” Or the words of St. Paul, in our second reading: “May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call,” a call received by each of us at baptism and reinvigorated in the power of the Holy Spirit at confirmation which you received this year. Or strengthened by the words of Jesus, in our gospel text, where he prayed for you, for each of us at the Last Supper the night before He died. Imagine our God praying for us, for each of you graduates, that final night with His disciples, that night He left us the most blessed Eucharist. Speaking of us, He prayed: “Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me.” And we are with Him each and every day of our lives.

On this visit, this adventure, to and in your new world, above all else, keep your eyes and hearts open each and every day for an encounter with Jesus as you learned in so many ways to encounter Him here at Little Flower. As the Pope underscored here at Washington: “First and foremost every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God, who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth. This relationship elicits a desire to grow in the knowledge and understanding of Christ and his teaching. In this way those who meet him are drawn by the very power of the Gospel to lead a new life characterized by all that is beautiful, good and true, a life of Christian witness nurtured and strengthened within the community of our Lord's disciples, the church.”

I leave you with the specific challenge given us by Benedict to all young people during his visit—the “four essential aspects of the treasure of our faith: personal prayer and silence, liturgical prayer, charity in action and vocations.” In these four ways we continue to encounter Jesus and we deepen our love and friendship with Him.

In personal prayer and silence, we listen for His voice. He wants to talk to us. He wants to hear from us the ups and downs of our challenges, the new challenges that high school will inevitably bring, challenges that He wishes to help us meet with love and purpose. In liturgical prayer, Jesus is at work especially at Sunday Mass and regular confession. It is there that we have the opportunity to praise and thank Him and be transformed by Him in the weekly Eucharist and healed and forgiven by sacramental confession. You encounter God.

In social action, we respond with a universal love for the poor, the marginalized, the suffering and sick—all those who cry out for love. Keep an eye open for a new classmate who seems to be having a hard time and make room for him or her in your circle. If you do, you will never be outside a circle of friends either.

Finally, vocations! And we thank today in special way the vocations of our parents and grandparents who were our first teachers in the faith and who continue to walk with us into our future. We include not only marriage life but the possibility of religious and the priestly vocation in our daily prayers for our futures.

Before we return to the altar, I wish to say a word of deep gratitude to the parents of our graduates. I have come to know most of you and know of your deep love and spirit of sacrifice and generosity. Day in and day out, you demonstrate the love of Jesus for your children, and our school and parish. Thank you in my name and their name as well.

I wish also to thank Sister Rosemaron, an extraordinary principal, our wonderful teachers and administrators who care for our children each and every day at school.

In special fashion, I wish to thank Father Woods publicly for his three years of active work in our school as he too graduates from Little Flower this year. You will be missed, Father Woods, and we pledge our prayers for you and ask the same from you.

One last word to our graduates, even though you will receive your diplomas today, diplomas signifying your graduation from our school, you do not graduate from our parish. Your roots are here. The priests, religious and lay teachers and your fellow parishioners remain here. We are always available to help you and grow in the faith with you.

As the Holy Father came to affirm us in our faith, each of us is affirmed anew as we return now to the altar of the Lord.

AMEN