**Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes/”The Presence” High School Retreat**

*(Isaiah 66: 10-14; John 2:1-11)*

February 11, 2017 3:00 p.m. Hackett Catholic Prep High School

Introductory remarks: A special thanks and acknowledgment to Father David Mary and the seven Brothers who are here with him for this weekend; Fathers Derda and Ankley, and most especially, all of YOU!I am so pleased to be with you this afternoon. I look forward to this retreat every year, but usually I get to celebrate the Final Mass on Sunday close to Noon. This year, because I’ll be leaving for Rome tomorrow morning, I won’t be able to do that.So, I’m grateful that I can celebrate Mass with you today for a couple reasons:even though you’re still adjusting to being here and getting to know one another, I know that you’re in for a truly blessed and very helpful weekend together. And by the time you gather for the Closing Mass tomorrow, I’m sure you’ll be agreeing with me.But another reason why I’m grateful to celebrate Mass with you today is because we get to celebrate our Blessed Mother by celebrating this Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes----a Feast that really has a lot to do with all of you as teenagers. It’s so important to have a good, loving spiritual relationship with our Blessed Mother, because she loves you and wants nothing more than to help you find happiness----and she knows better than anyone that the only way for you to find true and lasting happiness is for you to know and love her Son, Jesus!

That’s really what this whole retreat is about----to help you to come to know and love Jesus----to experience His “Presence” with us in the Church---in the sacraments----most especially in the Holy Eucharist. And in coming to know and love the “Presence” of Jesus, that you would come to be “amazed” and “overwhelmed” by how deeply, unconditionally, and personally God our Father loves you!

That’s the message of both the beautiful Scripture Readings we just listened to! Isaiah, the Old Testament Prophet, was “shouting from the rooftops”, so to speak: “*Rejoice with Jerusalem….Exult with her….Oh that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort…..as a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.”* We all know how much we need our mother’s love and comfort----maybe we don’t like to admit it at times, or perhaps you’re at an age when you want to let people think that you’re much too grown up and mature to care about things like that----but you know, and I know, that you’ll never outgrow the soothing kiss and hug, the comforting and reassuring words of love, that only your mother (and father) can give you. So, Isaiah is telling us that as much as that is true, God’s Love for us is just like a Mother’s Love for us that is infinite---eternal---unconditional.

And the Gospel of course is the beautiful account of the Wedding Feast of Cana. A wedding is one of life’s happiest moments----when two people stand before God, and their families and friends, and publicly pledge their love to one another for the rest of their lives. And, of course, after the wedding, there’s always a huge party that everyone looks forward to. In those days, the wedding reception could go on for several days, so making sure to have enough food and wine was essential. Obviously this couple was a friend, or perhaps a relative of Jesus, because not only was He there, but so was His Mother, and all His disciples.

Of course, we know the story----Mary became aware that the wine supply was running short which would have been a huge embarrassment for the couple and their families. No one knew Jesus as well as Mary did. She knew Who He was----she knew that He was God’s Son and her Son----she knew that Jesus had a special mission from God to save the world----and she knew that Jesus had the miraculous ability to do something about this “wine” situation. So, like any good mother, Mary went to Jesus to plant a seed----to pave the way---and all she said was: “*They have no wine.”* That was it. Jesus of course, like any good Son, felt free to be pretty frank with His mother by saying: “*Woman, how does your concern affect Me?”,* which quite honestly sounds a bit harsh because what He was really saying was what many of us might say: “So?!” But, because Mary knew her Son so well, she just went to the waiters and said: “*Do whatever He tells you.”* In other words, no matter what my Son asks you to do, and no matter how weird or strange that might seem to you----like fill those huge jars with water and then take some to the Chief Steward to ask him to taste it as though it was wine----Just Do It!

And of course we know the end of the story. The water miraculously was turned into wine-----and not just decent wine or good wine, but *excellentisimo vino*!----wine that made the Chief Steward shocked at how good it was. And not only was there enough wine, but there was more than enough---a superabundance of wine----more wine than anyone could possibly drink.

And that’s why I said earlier that today’s Readings are about how deeply, unconditionally and personally God our Father loves you----each and every one of you----each and every one of us. And that should “amaze” us and overwhelm us with joy!

I also said earlier that today’s Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes has a lot to do with you as teenagers. Let’s talk about that a bit. First of all we know that Our Blessed Mother has made a number of, what are called, “apparitions” over the centuries to various holy people, delivering important messages which all have to do with turning from sin and drawing close to Jesus. That was our Blessed Mother’s Mission from the first moment that she said “Yes/Fiat/Let it be done to me as you say” to the Archangel Gabriel that we celebrate on the Feast of the Annunciation each year when Jesus became conceived in Mary’s womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. She never stopped saying “Yes” throughout the rest of her human life on this earth, and she has never stopped saying “Yes” from her eternal vantage point in Heaven.

Our Blessed Mother always chooses humble, and unexpected, people to “appear” to in these various apparitions. When she appeared in Lourdes, France, in 1858, she chose a 14-year old girl named Bernadette Soubrioux, and two of her young friends. Bernadette was poor, and illiterate. In Bernadette’s writings, she always referred to our Blessed Mother as “the Lovely Lady”, and she made a particular notice of saying: “The Lovely Lady spoke to me with great respect and without condescension.”

That’s a big deal, isn’t it? I think many times, adults tend to treat “kids” as though they’re not there---or perhaps if they talk to them, they might “talk down” to them. That’s what’s so important about Bernadette’s comment---in spite of the fact that Bernadette was poor and couldn’t even read or write, Our Lady spoke to her with “respect”.

That’s how she wants to speak to each of you----she speaks to your heart----she speaks to you with respect and without condescension. And like any good mother, Mary, our Spiritual Mother, knows us better than we know ourselves. And just as she went to Jesus to “plant the seed”, to pave the way, to give Him a bit of a nudge to do the right thing even though He didn’t think it was yet His time----“His Hour”, in the very same way, Mary speaks to our hearts.

We might not be able to actually see her like Bernadette did in Lourdes, or Lucia and her companions did in Fatima, or as St. Juan Diego did when Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to him in Mexico-----but our Blessed Mother definitely speaks to each of you for the same reasons: because she loves us and wants us to be happy. And she knows that the only way we can find true and lasting happiness is to come to know and love her Son. She tells you the very same advice she gave the waiters in today’s Gospel: “*Do whatever He tells you.”*

It may be that some of what Jesus teaches in the Gospel might not make any more sense to you than when He told the waiters to fill up the huge water jars because they will become wine. When Jesus teaches us the Beatitudes----to be “poor in spirit” and “merciful” and “pure of heart” and to not “retaliate” or even to be OK with being persecuted for the cause of righteousness----that might not make sense to us at the time. When Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us; when Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek; when Jesus teaches us that if we really want to follow Him we have to deny ourselves, take up our Cross and follow in His footsteps, know that they lead to Calvary, but through Calvary to the glory of Resurrection----that might make us hesitate a bit.

Yet, Mary knows that we will find true and lasting happiness only when we heed her advice: “Do whatever He tells you!”

But, dear young friends, you can’t do that on your own. You need the support of good friends who share your faith; you need the loving support of your families who know that God must be # 1 in our lives; you need the strong love and accompaniment of your local parish where you can go to find Jesus’ Love in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. You need the Presence of Jesus in the deep, personal relationship you foster with Him, encouraged always by our dear Blessed Mother.

I pray that this weekend Retreat----these couple days together here—help to “plant the seed” and “pave the way” that Mary always wants to do for you to fight against sinful choices in your lives, and always choose to stay close to Jesus.

God bless you, now and always!