

ND Response Mass  
May 17<sup>th</sup> 2009

Good morning. My name is Fr. Kevin Russeau. I am a Holy Cross priest and I live and work here at the University of Notre Dame. I want to extend a warm welcome to my brother priests – some of whom have traveled far – some who join us from campus – and I especially wish to welcome all of you gathered this morning. On behalf of all the students, faculty, and staff who have worked to organize this weekend's demonstrations, I want to welcome you here to South Quad this morning for Mass and thank you for choosing to gather in prayer with us.

There is an instinct that is cultivated here at Notre Dame. When I was in the seminary it was told to us on several occasions that Notre Dame was once known as the Eucharistic campus since mass is so frequently celebrated here and celebrated regularly in so many places. As a priest I have witnessed what I think is an instinct for the Eucharist.

When a student learns that a loved one is sick, be it a parent, sibling, friend or acquaintance, a group of students get together and have a priest offer mass for their recovery.

When a couple becomes engaged on campus, friends gather again around the Eucharist to celebrate and wish the couple well.

In tragedies, which will always be too frequent, the community comes together to celebrate the Eucharist – the Eucharist brings consolation and healing to the community.

And when religious are ordained priests each year, we celebrate masses of thanksgiving within our campus community grateful for God's blessings.

It seems especially appropriate that in our time, a time of uncertainty, debate, confusion, and mixed emotion, that we should gather again around the table of the Lord to be nourished by his word and with his sacrament.

Much ink has been spilled regarding the controversy of this commencement weekend. There has been local and national coverage. The news and blog pages continue show images, interviews, and footage from campus and each network seems to have its own spin. One story that I don't hear enough about though, is the response of the student body. In the face of this controversy, I have witnessed countless students who have given me inspiration. Students who instinctively know to approach God in prayer about their trials, students who reach out to others in attempts to offer care, students who have demonstrated to me an ability to listen and obey the scripture we proclaim this day.

Jesus seems to make life easy for us when he summarizes what it is that God expects. He tells us clearly "love one another as I love you." This is the will of the Father: that you love. Jesus' love was constant throughout his ministry. Jesus' love healed the sick, proclaimed the good news, and spent time with the Father in prayer. Jesus' love cast out demons, raised the dead, and multiplied the loaves and fish! Jesus' love cleansed the temple of the money changers, washed the feet of his disciples, and forgave sins. All of his ministry and, indeed all of Jesus' life was an expression of love for humankind.

I often tell couples who are preparing for marriage that love is an exciting emotion to experience and an amusing one to watch! Though often reduced to physical expressions by our media, love is actually a great gift that was extended to us by God and love is also a vocation that we are called to share. The Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross, my religious community, tell us that our vows are meant to be an act of love to the God who first loved us! They remind us that God has loved us first – and that we are called to respond with love in return.

The kind of love that Jesus is actually speaking of today is not limited to his great miracles or sermons. Rather, it is a love that suffered scourging and a crown of thorns – his love bore a heavy cross and public humiliation – Jesus' love included abandonment and betrayal. Jesus' love for us experienced death so that we might have new life. So this message is not so easy when we look at it more closely, for the summary of God's expectations for us to love as he loved, is to love in a way that is sacrificial. To love with a love that is deeper than a relationship and more demanding than romance - to love even when it is difficult.

Sacrificial love comes in a variety of forms. It is expressed with patience and understanding. It is lived out when we put the needs of others before those of our own. Sacrificing is the love that doesn't count the cost – but extends the care. Sacrificing is the love that goes the extra mile. Our society encourages us to overcome sacrifice and to take care of ourselves. Jesus tells us today to not be scandalized by the word sacrifice: it is the love that he shared for us and the love we are called to share for him and each other.

What has been inspiring for me these past couple of months, with all the trials and challenges that have confronted the family of Notre Dame, is that our student body had an instinct – an instinct to come to the altar of the Lord to ask for guidance and strength. I can't tell you the number of rosaries and masses and prayer meetings that have been intentional responses to what many feel is a concession to the culture of death. Students, family, friends, alumni, and many of you, have spent hours in adoration looking for the proper response. The students that I have come to know here on campus have reminded me that in all things we must respond with love. And to respond with love in hard times, we must ask our Lord for grace.

We are here today to bear witness and to love. We have gathered today to give voice to the most vulnerable. I don't know what the cost of your sacrificial love will be anymore than I know the cost of the love I hope to share. But in times of confusion and sadness as well as those times of joy and celebration, perhaps it is our instinct which prompts us to come to the Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist to be nourished and strengthened in our vocation.

May God bless us this day and bless all who work for the culture of life.