

Most Reverend John Oliver Barres, S.T.D., J.C.L., D.D.
Vespers Homily, Monday Evening, January 30, 2017

On this Eve of my Installation as the fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, together we open ourselves to the missionary mysticism of St. Paul in our time and in our moment of Church and World history.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul expresses his thanksgiving and joy for this community of missionary disciples and he urges them to open themselves up to an even deeper level of charity, conversion and holiness.

Dear young people present this evening in St. Agnes Cathedral, and young Catholics throughout the Diocese of Rockville Centre and around the world, you are critical to this moment of history. You are being called by Jesus, St. Paul and Pope Francis to be “missionary disciples.”

Young people, it is your personal love for Jesus, your determination to open your life to his will and the mission of mercy of his Catholic Church that will help carry his love and mercy into the future.

I am so grateful you are here and I look forward to meeting you, serving you, and laying my life down for you as your Shepherd and Bishop.

This evening we Catholics of every generation listen to God in silence as a Church and we discern together the signs of our times and the movement of the Holy Spirit motivating, animating, driving us in history.

This listening to the Holy Spirit involves the logic of the Paschal Mystery. We embrace the cross, die to our pride, our ego and our need to control.

We die to an insular and self-referential perspective and the familiar refrain that it has always been done this way.

We rise in grace and a new creativity for the New Evangelization. We rise in holiness. We rise in our deepest desires to promote the Glory of God and the evangelizing mission of the Church in our times.

We remember Paul’s life-changing encounter with the Risen Lord on the Road to Damascus.

This very same Risen Lord wants to change our lives with his love. He wants to cast Fire on the earth and Fire in our souls.

Tonight we invite that healing Fire and Light into the wounds we have all experienced in life. We bring our own unique personal history to the healing light that streams from the glorified wounds of the Risen Christ.

This streaming light touches our wounds, leads us to conversion, and helps us in turn to touch the wounds of humanity.

The wounds and traumas of our lives and their impact on us are complex, painful, often mysterious and not easy to ever completely and fully resolve in this life.

And yet the wounds in our souls and psyches can be, with the power of the Holy Spirit, the birthplaces of world-changing compassion, mercy and charity toward others.

Dear young people, the hurts and wounds of life that you have already experienced at a young age can be the birthplaces of great compassion and service to others. Jesus is always with you to comfort, strengthen and inspire you. And so are we.

Abbe Trochu, the great biographer of St. John Vianney, the patron of priests, connected the Cure of Ars' dedication to hearing hours upon hours of confessions to St. Paul's Road to Damascus conversion experience. Trochu writes: "*Thus for countless souls the road to Ars (and the confessional of St. John Vianney) became the road to Damascus (and life-changing conversion).*"

Mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel and the beating heart of the mission of the Catholic Church on earth.

Mercy is also the beating heart of our parish confessionals, our "combat field hospitals."

When we go to confession, we penitents hear these revolutionary and life-changing words of absolution: "I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Dear young people, as your Shepherd, I will be asking you over and over again to make frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance.

Remember that when you enter the Door of Mercy of the confessional, you bring with you every member of your family, every classmate, every relationship in your past life, present life and future life.

As you confess your sins and receive absolution, you rise to a fresh start, a new and resurrected spirit of forgiveness, humility, charity and mercy that leads to deeper grace-filled patterns and conversions in all your friendships and relationships.

We also open ourselves through the Sacrament of Penance to being more effective Good Samaritans to our own families, our global family and especially the poor and suffering of the world.

Confession helps us break through the superficiality of consumerism and global indifference and makes us sensitive and compassionate to the needs of the poor, the hungry, and the persecuted refugee family.

We remember and give thanks this evening for St. Paul's existential conviction in Galatians 2:20: "It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." This moment-by-moment Pauline mysticism is accessible to all of us.

Paul periodically found himself in chains but he knew that the inspired Word of God could never be chained.

And so with St. Paul, we ask that our lives be a rich kaleidoscope of light flowing from a variety of biblical passages that we study, pray, contemplate and live. (Cf. Pope Benedict XVI's *Word of the Lord*)

Dear young Catholics, we want you to be deeply biblical Catholics – on Fire with the Word of God! Praying the Word of God. Studying the Word of God. Living the Word of God. Transforming the World with the Word of God!

We also remember Paul's cosmic sense of the Eucharist and his understanding that Eucharistic charity and Eucharistic mercy are at the heart of the Church's spirit of communion and mission to the world.

We call you our young people, and all Catholics, to a radical fidelity to the Eucharist and the Sunday Catholic Mass, a fidelity that will open your lives to the great and unique adventure that the Holy Spirit has planned for you.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul identifies himself as Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:1) which was one of the earliest statements of our belief and conviction in the doctrine of Apostolic Succession.

It was their belief in the truth of this doctrine that helped to lead my parents, Oliver and Marjorie Barres, who were Protestant ministers, to the Catholic Church, never foreseeing that their fifth child, in turn, would become a successor of the Apostles as the Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

This Psalm Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours expresses our Catholic conviction about the link between successors of the Apostles through every century and their service to the People of God: "Father, as you made springs in valleys to form streams between mountains, so you made living streams of grace flow from the apostles that their teaching may bring salvation to all nations." (LOH, p. 830)

As we ask the intercession of the canonized Popes and Bishops in history, as well as the patroness of the Diocese, St. Agnes of Rome, I think of the common characteristics of the

Bishops, such as Bishop William Murphy and Bishop Edward Cullen, who have befriended and inspired me.

Each of them deeply and completely realizes that a Bishop's authority and call to cultivate communion and mission in the Church is established, strengthened and deepened in their radical "kenosis" or self-emptying, in the way they give themselves to washing the feet of all of humanity.

And so together we cast the nets of the New Evangelization constantly, nets that are lined with mercy, compassion, humility and the Splendor of Truth.

We cast those nets creatively in our homes, in our friendships, in our parishes, in our neighborhoods and where we work.

We cast those nets upon our Island, our City, our Empire State, our Nation and our World.

We cast those nets globally and digitally using every dimension of social media available.

And dear young people, you "text" and "tweet" 20 times faster than the rest of us so we are really counting on you!

We will be counting on you to use social media to witness to your love for Jesus and the Mission of Mercy of the Catholic Church.

We will be counting on you to use social media to build people up in charity rather than to tear people down in the destructive cyber-bullying that is so traumatic for so many of our young people today. Thank you so much for your courage, your character and your world-changing Catholic faith.

Though I am just beginning to meet all of you, I already am giving a Pauline thanks to God for you.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis echoes the spirit of St. Paul through the centuries when he says: "The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy." (21) I look forward to sharing that missionary joy with all of you.