October 21, 2016 Hackett Catholic Prep 8:30 a.m.

**Opening Mass for the Diocesan New Evangelization Convocation**

“Art of Accompaniment” Votive Mass for Evangelization of Peoples

(Readings of the Day: Eph. 4:1-6; Lk. 12:54-59)

Praised be Jesus Christ!---------That is a beautiful greeting----but it’s more: that is our mission----that is our calling and our vocation: to give honor and glory to our God and Savior Jesus Christ who IS God with us, Who has come to walk with us, and Who has brought us salvation through His death and Resurrection----and Who remains always with us through His Church. It is our privilege and responsibility to praise God by living our lives in union with Him and His Church.

It’s so good for you to be here for this Convocation----to have taken the time from your daily responsibilities---representing almost half of our parishes and most of our Catholic Schools----and to gather with one another for this day (and some of you for two days) so that we can reflect together on our vocation---our mission as followers of Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters with one another in the Body of Christ.

The Scripture Readings we’ve just heard were not chosen especially by anyone here, but they very well may have been chosen by the Holy Spirit for us to hear today because this morning’s First Reading from St. Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians perfectly summarizes who we are and what we are all about. Paul’s opening words: “*I, Paul, a prisoner for the Lord*…..”-----writing from one of his many imprisonments he endured for his faithful preaching no matter what the consequences----went on to “*urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received…”*

So, what is the “call” we have all received, and when did it take place? We have to go all the way back----for some of us that’s wayyyyyy back-----to the day of our Baptism. While we may not be able to remember our own, I’m sure that you’ve all been in the position of brining your own child, or a relative’s or dear friend’s child---to be baptized. And during the beautiful rites of that Primary of all Sacraments, the priest/deacon, after the pouring of the water which washes away Original Sin and makes us worthy to be called a son or daughter of God, and after the anointing with Chrism which sets us apart as precious in God’s sight, the parents/godparents of the child are given a candle which has been lighted from the Easter Candle----the representation of Jesus’ Victory over sin and death and the Sign that Jesus IS the Light of the world----and says: “This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ; he/she is to walk always as a child of the light. May she/he keep the flame of faith alive in her/his heart; when the Lord comes, may he/she go out to meet Him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.”

That sums up our “Call” that St. Paul reminded us we need to live worthily. And he even told us HOW we need to do that----humbly, gently, patiently, and bearing with one another through the love of Christ, always working to maintain unity in the Body.

All we have to do is look around us in our world----to listen to the incredibly uncouth and embarrassing discourse of so-called political leaders during this awful presidential campaign----or even to read the comments that people post on social media that is hurtful, demeaning, crude and destructive-----to realize that what St. Paul is calling us to, and what Jesus came to lead us toward, is in direct opposition to what those who do not know or follow Jesus are about.That means that if we heed St. Paul’s urging---if we choose to follow Jesus----we will find ourselves in opposition to many others.

We live in far different times. There was a time not too long ago----perhaps many of us can remember that time----when there was some sense of respect for what one another thought or believed. That’s not the case in these days. I hope we realize that we are living once again in the age of the martyrs----our sisters and brothers in Syria---in many parts of the Holy Land where Jesus conquered sin and death---are being run out of their homes, persecuted and murdered just because they are Catholics or Christians. We heard about the 85-year old French priest, Fr. Jacques Hamel in Rouen, France who was slain at the very altar where he was celebrating Mass; his final words addressed to his murderer were: “Begone Satan!”. And just two months ago, two religious women, Sister Margaret Held and Sister Paul Merrill---sisters who devoted their lives to working among the poor---were senselessly murdered in rural Mississippi in our own country.

While much of the world focuses on power, physical/economic/military strength, and demeaning communication which leads to greater division and deeper disunity, St. Paul, in the name of Jesus, urges us to live humbly, gently, patiently, and bearing with one another in the love of Jesus, leading always to unity in the “*one Lord, one, faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

That’s what we’re here today to reflect on----our calling---our mission----and how we can only do that through Jesus and His Church. That’s what Pope Francis has been talking about so much----how we, as Church, “accompany” one another.We don’t just dictate. The Church isn’t about setting down rules that people are left to try to follow as best they can. No----the Church is about community----it’s about coming together as the Body of Christ---it’s about helping one another----it’s about accompanying one another along the way.

In fact, while our translation of today’s First Reading begins with St. Paul urging us to live in a manner worthy of our calling, the literal meaning of his words are: “I urge you to walk together in a manner worthy of your calling.”

That’s what Jesus did. That’s what the Church does. That’s what we need to do.

Jesus told us in today’s Gospel that we need to “interpret the present time”. And He also told us that we should not give into the rulers and judges of our day and time to settle our differences, because we already know what is right and just. And so, aware of the fact that the “signs of the present times” are so opposed to Jesus’ Way and the teachings of His Church, we need to find other ways to work together to resolve our differences.

Our faith tells us that each of us is made in the image and likeness of God. And we know that our God----a Trinity of Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit---live together in perfect Unity and Oneness. Sin, which of course is separation from God, begs for absolution to restore unity---unity within ourselves and unity among the Body of Christ and unity with our God. Sin is an aberration---and we know in our very souls that disunity and division is wrong.

The desire to foster unity, peace and reconciliation in the world is at the heart of the Church’s mission. St. Paul longed for that unity in today’s Reading. The primary role of the Holy Father is to preserve the unity of the church throughout the world, and that is one of the primary reasons why Pope Francis has called for this great Year of Mercy which is drawing to a close----to remind us of our need to seek God’s mercy for our sins and to encourage us to be agents of God’s mercy to others as we work to end divisions in our relationships and to foster corporal and spiritual works of mercy for those in need. And, of course, that is also my primary role as Bishop---to preserve and foster the unity of the Church.

But what about your role as faithful members of the Body of Christ. Your role is to live in that unity with one another. Each of us is called to heal whatever is “not whole”----first of all within ourselves. We need to not just go to Church and follow the Church’s rules and observe God’s commandments. Each and every one of us has to develop---foster----work on----a deeply personal and vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ. We have to know Him and Love Him---and we have to allow Him to love us.That is our primary work----our most important mission---in our lives.And of course, we need to heal whatever is “not whole” in our relationships with others. And ultimately, each of us needs to do what we can to bring the healing love of Jesus to our broken and divided world.That’s what St. Paul means by urging us to live in a manner worthy of our calling.

I have written all of you a letter----it’s my new Pastoral Letter entitled “*Moving Forward in Hope: Charting the Course for the Future*”.In that Letter, I reflect on the great transition that we have all just gone through as we’ve moved our 59 parishes into 28 Collaboratives, and as we’re all undergoing various adjustments in new schedules, and perhaps with new priests.But what I try to focus on is that all that readjustment into Collaboratiaves, and new Mass schedules, and new priests are not what’s ultimately important. What remains critically important is if these changes help us to accomplish what is our primary calling----and that is to come to know Jesus Christ and to give Him praise as we walk along the Pilgrimage of Faith---this “journey of a lifetime--- in this world, which leads us to our final destination---eternal life with God in Heaven.

We can’t do that alone. We need the Accompaniment of the Church and of one another to help keep us on the right paths---to move always forward in hope.In the last chapter of my Pastoral Letter, I articulate a 5-point Vision---a list of “hopes and dreams” for our Diocese”:

1. That we will allow the Holy Spirit too guide the work of the Church throughout our Diocese;
2. That each of us will embrace our own “call to holiness” that flows from our baptism and a calling that we all share no matter whether we are married, single or ordained;
3. That our Diocese will be “set on fire” with love for Jesus and that we will show that love in reaching out to those among us in need;
4. That we will live with one another in charity, justice and mercy---as our Loving God does;
5. That we will not only be passive members of the Church, but actively engaged in sharing the faith, defending the faith, and spreading the faith, and accompanying one another along the journey of faith.

That is what we are all about, dear sisters and brothers in Christ. That is our calling---that is our “vision”---that is the mission that flows from our Baptism into Christ.

I love the Psalm Response for today’s Mass: “Lord, this is the people who long to see Your Face”

It makes me wonder who the Psalmist was looking at when he said that----how were those people living, and loving, and working together following God’s ways and helping to build one another up in God’s Love----that enabled him to call them “people who long to see God’s Face”?

Do you think if people came and saw us here today that the same could be said about us? I hope so.

May this Conference help us to be accompanied along our Pilgrimage of Faith, and may it inspire us to help to accompany others along the way----because we ARE people who long to see God’s Face, not just at the end of our pilgrimage, but at every point along the way in the faces of our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Praised be Jesus Christ----now and forever. Amen.