

**2017 ANNUAL COURAGE/EnCOURAGE CONFERENCE
MUNDELEIN UNIVERSITY SEMINARY CHAPEL
OPENING MASS HOMILY
THURSDAY, JULY 27, 2017
5:00 PM**

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BISHOP OF BROOKLYN**

We come today to this Eucharist to begin a conference that will center on the word “Courage.” Courage is a Greek word which means boldness and confidence. When Jesus uses this word, He tells us, “Fear not!” He especially uses this word when He speaks to those whose sin He is about to forgive or whose infirmity He is about to heal.

There are two great examples of this in Gospels that have been read during this very month of July. The first is in Matthew’s Gospel when Jesus encounters a paralytic, a paralyzed man, and says, “Courage child, your sins are forgiven.” This, unfortunately, started the Scribes murmuring because they thought Jesus was blaspheming. Who can forgive sins? But He proceeded the act of forgiveness by saying “Courage, be bold, do not be afraid.” Again, in Matthew’s Gospel, we see Jesus encountering a woman suffering for twelve years from hemorrhaging. The woman came up behind Him and touched the tassel of His cloak, thinking to herself, “If only I could touch His cloak, I would be cured.” And Jesus turned and saw her and said, “Courage daughter, your faith has saved you.” And from that hour the woman was cured. “Courage.” Jesus uses the word because it imparts a certain boldness and confidence, it takes away fear and also is a sign of God’s healing grace that all of us need in our lives.

St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians of our Church, said that courage is a virtue or a power that comes from mercy, mercy and charity. How odd. How could we be emboldened by mercy? Well, when mercy is shown to us we are encouraged, and we do feel emboldened. When we combine this with charity, it is certainly clear that the love of God assists us in receiving God’s mercy and forgiveness, which gives us courage. The pagan philosophers thought that courage meant bravery. St. Paul tells us, however, that courage really is endurance, holding on, not losing heart, which is another meaning of the word encourage. As St. Thomas reminds us, courage is also one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And sometimes courage is called fortitude, but it is really courage, the enduring power to keep trying to do God’s will in our lives.

The Gospel proclaimed at today’s Mass contains a complaint of the Disciples telling Jesus that He speaks to the crowds in parables. And yet, many times the people misunderstand these parables. At times Jesus took the Disciples aside and explained the parables in depth to them. We see this in many places in the Scripture, an interpretation which Jesus later gave to the Disciples. Perhaps this reminds us that we cannot ever understand everything, that life is full of ambiguity and sometimes contradictions.

You who experience same-sex attraction and family members who try to assist you in dealing with this attraction sometimes cannot understand. Science has not explained this to us. We do know that this attraction is not a genetic characteristic, although nature has some part in it, while many believe that nurturing has a greater part. The nurturing we receive, especially as young children, does influence our lives in so many ways; in particular same-sex attraction may be the result of accidental influences upon our character at a young age. The question is not its origin. The question is that we are endowed with free will, that we are not determined in any way to do what even our own tendencies tell us. The prayer that Jesus taught us is so important to understand, the Our Father. In it we pray that "Thy will be done." That God's will be done and that we have the courage again to do God's will and not our own will, not following our own tendencies.

As you participate in this conference and in this Eucharist, you will be challenged to understand better same-sex attraction and how it cannot be a dominating influence of our lives. We are so much greater than our faults, our attractions or anything else. We are made up of so many human characteristics. We are God's creation. We are in fact the greatest creation that God has made. As St. John Paul II tells us, we are the only creature that God has made for Himself. If we are made in the image and likeness of God, and if God created us for Himself, then we must take courage that we can mirror the love of God in our lives. And that we can follow God's will, no matter even if at times it seems difficult or even impossible. Grace, we know, is God's presence with us. Each one of us lives in God's presence. Each one of us experiences the grace that assures us that God's presence is within us. We need to call upon that grace at all times, remembering as the Scriptures tell us that we are never given a burden that we cannot carry. Although same-sex attraction is a burden, it is not an insurmountable characteristic that can keep us from loving God and from loving others as God intended.

The Eucharist itself is our greatest power, our greatest gift of healing. I have already quoted two Gospel incidents when Jesus is about to heal or forgive tells the person, "Courage." Courage my son, my daughter, my family! Courage. Encourage. Be open to receiving the gift of healing that comes to us with the Eucharist. Jesus is the divine doctor. He is the healer of souls. He binds our wounds and He gives us courage. Jesus enables us to overcome whatever keeps us from loving Him and others.

May the Lord give you the courage you need, each in your own way, that you might find the peace and comfort of this Eucharist and of the Christian life itself.

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