

I In the first reading today Paul and Barnabas spoke to their listeners about the necessity of facing hardship in God's service. They knew of what they spoke since they had both previously been stoned for their preaching of Jesus Christ. Both would eventually give their lives for their faith. In this homily I will link this reality of suffering for the Catholic faith speaking especially to your sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters who are graduating from college this year.

A. On May 11, of this year, Vice President Mike Pence spoke at Liberty University's Commencement. He gave a stirring address to the students of this Evangelical Christian school. He said, trying to prepare these students for what to expect, "The truth is we live in a time when the freedom of religion is under assault. We live in a time when it's become acceptable and even fashionable to ridicule and even discriminate against people of faith." He cited as an example the reaction of the secular media to his wife's returning to teach art part time at Immanuel Christian School in Northern Virginia, where she had previously taught for 12 years. Karen Pence was vilified because the school's policy on

morality requires parents and students to adhere to “the biblical lifestyle the school teaches.” She was criticized for condoning discrimination against people who don’t adhere to the bible’s moral standards. She did not have to be guilty of an act of discrimination to receive this criticism. She simply had to be a Christian striving to live and teach her faith. Remember, this is a private school in which she is teaching, not a public one. Some people are hostile to the idea of private religious schools having the right to teach Christian morals and would like to see it made illegal. That’s scary. Had Karen Pence gone to a Catholic School to teach, like our own St. Joseph School, she and our school could have been criticized in the same way since our Catholic morality taught in this school is an offense to some people and they do not want to tolerate it.

B. This attack on Karen Pence is not an isolated incident. Remember how viciously and quickly the high school students from Covington Catholic High School were vilified because the media said they were discriminating against a Native American activist and members of a sect called the Black Hebrew Israelites. The media was quick to judge. In fact, they did not have to wait for all the information to judge; they knew ahead of time the Catholic students had to be guilty. The media, it turned out, was wrong.

C. Recently a person tweeted a hashtag called “Expose Christian Schools” inviting students to share their experiences at Christian Schools. On the surface this seems harmless enough. But, as one writer said this article is already written. The man starting this campaign just wants ammunition to bolster his hate of Christian Schools. The New York Times has taken up the cause. The material put out so far says Christian schools are only “incubating future cultural warriors.” I certainly hope so. We would call that teaching students how to live out their faith. Another headline screams “See how homeschooling is used by the Christian right to indoctrinate kids into extremism and what can be done about that.” (Your homeschoolers have always been suspecting. I knew you were not teaching your children the Catholic Faith; you were indoctrinating them). One response to this anti-Christian school effort said “[Expose Christian Schools] is an incredibly bigoted hashtag. If people were tweeting this about any other religion, it would (rightfully) stir up a lot of outrage. I say this as a Jew who went to Yeshiva. It’s wrong.”

D. You can read the current news about the backlash especially from Hollywood against the states of Alabama and Georgia who recently passed laws severely restricting abortion. Producers, directors and actors from Hollywood said they plan to boycott

both states, that no movies would be made in those states and that corporations that have their headquarters in either of those states, think Atlanta Georgia, should relocate. If you want to be pro-life there is a price to pay. Pro-life demonstrators have been attacked on college campuses and most recently one of our own state representatives badgered an elderly woman praying the rosary outside a Planned Parenthood office. He had previously done the same thing to three Catholic teenage girls for the same “offence”, praying the rosary outside of places offering abortions.

E. Vice President Pence concluded his remarks to this graduating class saying, “Some of the loudest voices for tolerance today have little tolerance for traditional Christian beliefs. You’re going to be asked not just to tolerate things that violate your faith; you’re going to be asked to endorse them. You’re going to be asked to bow down to the idols of popular culture.”

F. So, you students who are graduating, America needs men and women of faith now more than ever, just like Paul, Barnabas and thousands of other brave souls throughout the Church’s history who proclaimed the faith. As you strive for greatness in living your faith according to Catholic principles based on the Bible you will face opposition. Do not be

afraid. Opposition simply means you have a challenge in front of you, the challenge to persevere and never give up.