

HOMILY FOR CONFIRMATION OF CATHOLIC ADULTS
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois
Pentecost Sunday, May 24, 2015

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

One of my favorite music groups is a British band called Coldplay. I like them so much I've seen them in concert three times! Yes, bishops go to concerts, too! Last year Coldplay released a new album called *Ghost Stories*. According to lead singer Chris Martin, *Ghost Stories* is a spiritually driven album that revolves around two major themes. First, the album looks at the idea of past actions and the effects they can have on your future. Second, the lyrics explore one's capacity for Unconditional Love. To Chris Martin, *Ghost Stories* represents "a journey learning about Unconditional Love," which is another way of describing God, who is Love (see 1 John 4:8 and 1 John 4:16).¹

One of the songs on this album is called "A Sky Full of Stars." It starts

'Cause you're a sky, 'cause you're a sky full of stars

I'm gonna give you my heart

'Cause you're a sky, 'cause you're a sky full of stars

'Cause you light up the path

...

After a few verses about seeing God in the heavenly view of a sky full of stars, the song closes with:

'Cause in a sky, 'cause in a sky full of stars

I think I see you

I think I see you

'Cause you're a sky, 'cause you're a sky full of stars

Such a heavenly view

You're such a heavenly view

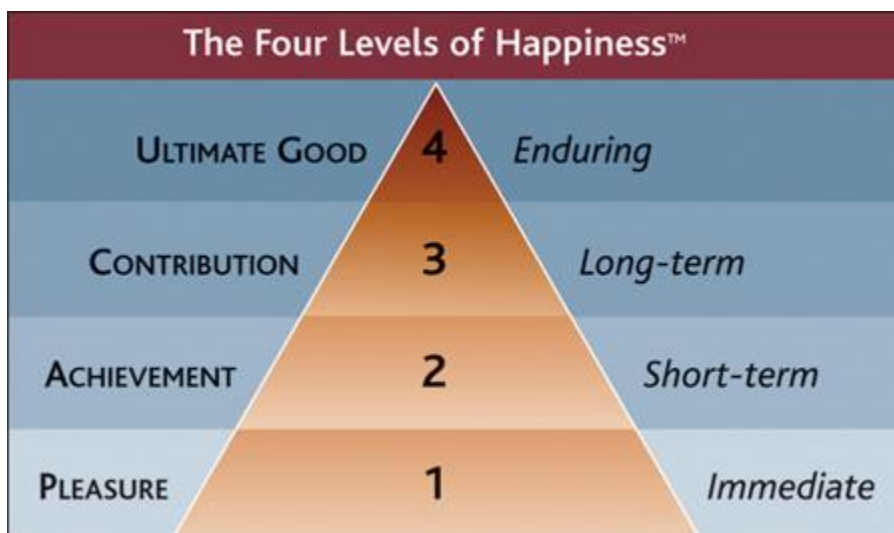
"A Sky Full of Stars" is one of the most joyful music videos I've ever seen. It conveys a very positive message about God's unconditional love for us. This love calls for a response from us. You might be wondering: will you feel any different when you are confirmed? Maybe yes, maybe no! Just like with our parents, we do not always feel God's love, but it is there, e.g., Psalm 89:32-24: "If they fail to observe my commandments, I will punish them . . . but I will never take back my love." God loves us even when He punishes us, just as our parents love us even when they administer some discipline designed to help us to be better persons.

In this Sacrament of Confirmation, God the Father pours out His unconditional love on His children through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Preface for Masses of the Holy Spirit contains the line praying to God the Father, “Ascending above all the heavens and sitting at your right hand, [Jesus] poured out the promised Holy Spirit on your adopted children.”

As a loving Father, God wants us to be happy. We all want to be happy, too. Father Robert Spitzer, S.J., spoke to the priests of our diocese a few weeks ago about the Four Levels of Happiness. Put simply, happiness can be sought at higher or lower levels that either lift us up or drag us down. While all the levels are good, happiness becomes more pervasive, enduring and deep as one goes up the scale.

Viewing the Four Levels of Happiness as a pyramid, Level One at the base of the pyramid represents our desire for immediate gratification, such as satisfying our appetites for food or bodily comfort, such as eating a delicious meal when you’re really hungry. The pleasure may be intense, but it also passes quickly. Level Two is concerned with personal achievement. It is also short-term, but judges success in comparison and competition with other. We enjoy our successes, but feel envy if others are more successful than we are. Level Three looks beyond oneself to the good

of others. It seeks to make a connection and contribution to the community. The happiness that comes from such self-giving is long-lasting. Finally, Level Four represents the perfect, unrestricted and eternal happiness that comes from union with God. Such happiness is eternal; it lasts forever. It is no coincidence that Jesus said the two great commandments are to love God with all your heart and mind and soul (that's Level Four Happiness), and to love your neighbor as yourself (that's Level Three Happiness). All four levels are important and present throughout life, but we do not want to be fixated at One or Two.



The grace of the Holy Spirit gives us the grace to move beyond the selfish focus of Levels One and Two and move toward the everlasting happiness that comes from love of God and neighbor.

My prayer for you is that you will accept God's grace and remain committed in your Catholic faith for the rest of your lives. This will not be easy, especially as you go out from the community. For example, if you go to college, you should expect to be challenged about your faith by atheists, agnostics, secularists and other non-believers. How will you respond? Will you remain strong in your faith? Can you articulate why you believe what you believe? Or will you wither and cave in to peer pressure?

In this regard, recently I saw a movie called, "God's Not Dead." It tells the story of a young Christian who takes a philosophy course in college. The professor is an atheist and asks all of his students to sign a paper saying, "God is dead." In a class of about 100 students, all of them sign except for one. The professor says if he won't sign the paper, the student would have to get up in front of the class and prove to them that God is not dead. I won't tell you how it turns out, in case you haven't seen the movie yet, but it does cause each one of us to ask ourselves what we would do in that situation: take the easy way out, avoid confrontation and sign the paper, or stand up for your Catholic faith and your belief in God.

Now, in real life, the challenges will probably not be so overt or in-your-face" as in a Hollywood movie. You probably won't have somebody

coming up to you asking you to sign a piece of paper declaring that you are an atheist! The challenges will be much more subtle, perhaps even from your friends. For example, it's Sunday and you're planning to go to Mass, and your friends invite you to go with them to a movie, but you say you can't go because you have other plans. Your friends ask you what you're planning to do and you say you're going to Mass. They ask, "You're doing what?" You respond, "Yes, I'm Catholic and I go to Mass on Sunday because I want to receive Christ into my heart!" Then, take it a step further: invite them to come with you to Mass! That's what we call "evangelization" - inviting others to share in the Good News of God's love!

The movie includes an appearance by a Christian music group called "The Newsboys," in which they sing the title song, "God's not Dead." The lyrics of the refrain are easy to pick up, so I'll sing them a couple of times and then ask you to sing with me:

My God's not dead

He's surely alive

He's living on the inside

Roaring like a lion

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_Stories_\(Coldplay_album\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_Stories_(Coldplay_album)).