

**ADDRESS OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY FOR BELEN JESUIT PREPARATORY SCHOOL  
MIAMI, FLORIDA – MAY 24, 2024**

Greetings to all of you! In a special way I wish to greet Fr. David Pantaleón, local superior of the Jesuits of the Caribbean Province; Fr. Guillermo García-Tuñón, President of Belen Jesuit Preparatory School; and Mr. José Roca, Principal; as well the school administrators, faculty, and staff of Belen. Greetings also to the parents, grandparents, and guests. And to you graduates of the class of 2024: congratulations, and be assured of my prayers for all of you! In my role as Apostolic Nuncio, I have the privilege of representing the Holy Father wherever I travel in this country. And so, I am happy to convey to you the Pope’s spiritual communion. But you know, of course, that Pope Francis is a Jesuit! And so, coming here to Belen, I can assure you that he has a special closeness to you, based on the connection that you have with him, in view of your Jesuit formation.

Dear Young Men, Class of 2024, as you graduate from Belen and step into the next stage of your journey, I want you to know three things. First, that you have been given a **gift** by God. Second, that you are **called** to greatness by sharing your gift with the world wherever you go. And third – *and this is the key* – that you will know your gift and your call through an ongoing personal **encounter** with Jesus Christ. *Gift. Call. Encounter.*

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*Gift*

In your Scripture classes here at Belen, you undoubtedly learned about St. Paul. Paul knew what it was to receive a gift from God. He knew that a gift was something completely unearned. Not the result of hard work, or a reward granted because of good behavior; but rather, a priceless treasure freely bestowed by God out of love. You know the story. Paul was on a journey of persecuting Christians, when Jesus Christ appeared to him from heaven, revealed to him the truth, and gave

Paul the completely unexpected gift of faith. From that moment on, Paul spent the rest of his life and all of his energy sharing the gift of his faith with anyone who would listen. And he never stopped seeking the face of Christ, whom he had first encountered on the road to Damascus. He received a gift, through which he recognized a call, and he obeyed that call by a continual encounter with Christ.

Saint Paul, who had *experienced* the gift of God, also *taught* about gift in his writings. During the Easter season, we heard at one of the Masses a reading from St. Paul's letters to Timothy. Paul tells the younger Timothy: "Stir into flame the gift you have been given."<sup>1</sup> For Timothy, the specific "gift" that Paul refers to is the grace of ordination for a special ministry in the Church. I hope that when you hear that – "Stir into flame the gift you have been given" – each of you understands that these words apply to you also. Indeed, I pray that for some of you, your gift will be like the gift that Timothy received: a call to be a priest! But even if you are not called to Holy Orders, each one of you has been given a gift from God. Your very life is a gift. You didn't choose to exist – that was God's choice – and you only came to birth because of the free gift of your parents. (By the way, be sure to *thank* your parents today! And your grandparents.) Our parents are the first human beings who impart to us a gift from God. Beyond life itself, you were given many other gifts that enabled you to grow in body, mind, and spirit.

A gift that all of you share in common is that you have come to this school – a premier center of education. The fact that Belen even exists today is a gift given by the heroic missionaries who first founded it in Cuba, and by those who resurrected it here in Florida when persecution had suppressed it. At this school, you have been given a strong intellectual, physical, social, and spiritual formation, which has cultivated in each of you the unique set of gifts that God has given you personally. Echoing St. Paul, I say to you: "Stir into flame" the gifts you have received! Have confidence in your gifts, knowing that they are from God, and that God will always work with you in using them.

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 1:6.

## *Call*

And what is your gift for? So that you can answer a call. The call is to do what I know you have heard during your time at Belen: to “go forth and set the world on fire”. The “fire” is really the Holy Spirit that you carry within you. When you live, speak, and act according to the Spirit, you do what fire does: You warm the hearts of people who need to know that they are loved by God. You purify your environment by “burning away” evil influences – that is, by rejecting them. And you enlighten the minds of people who are looking for the truth. You know, from what you have been taught here, that this is the spirit of the *Magis* – the desire to do more, to be more, and to give more for the greater glory of God and the betterment of humanity. This is the call of God and his Church that you are stepping into as you graduate from here. By the very strong education you have been given at Belen, you have been equipped to become leaders in society and the Church. You really can be salt, leaven, and light in this world that needs the transforming power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The message that has been planted in you is a message that can bring dialogue and peace where there is war, justice where there is exploitation, unity where there is polarization, and compassion where there is indifference.

Hearing the greatness of such a call might be daunting. But don’t be afraid! God calls each of you to greatness, but it is always God’s work; and he works with each of you in a unique and individual way. He knows your nature – after all, he is the one who created you! And so, your particular expression of greatness will be suited to you. The saints all gave glory to God, but they did so in very diverse ways. Listen to the words of a prayer by Cardinal John Henry Newman, who was very different from St. Ignatius of Loyola, but still a saint! He said:

“God has created me to do him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission. [...] I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. I shall do good, I shall do his work. Therefore, I will trust him. Whatever, wherever I am, I cannot be thrown away.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Mission of My Life*, Cardinal St. John Henry Newman.

## *Encounter*

“I will trust him,” says Newman. Dear Graduates, to *trust* in God is such an important thing. And you can trust him, provided that you have really *encountered* him, in a deep and personal way. You were only young boys when Benedict XVI was still the Pope, but there was nothing more important to him than what he called “my personal search ‘for the face of the Lord’”<sup>3</sup>. Here he was: a great theologian, a man of long experience, the Pope himself (!), and he was still seeking the face of the Lord, with a childlike faith. That is a great lesson for us. As Benedict said, which Pope Francis has repeated: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”.<sup>4</sup>

I would also like to encourage you with the words that Pope Francis spoke to the young people gathered at World Youth Day in Portugal last August. Listen carefully to what he says, because it applies to you. He said:

“You are not here by accident. The Lord has called you...from the very beginning of your days. He called you by name. [...] At the beginning of the story of our lives, before any talents we may have, before any shadows or wounds we may be carrying in our hearts, we were called. Why? Because we are loved. This is something beautiful. In God’s eyes, we are precious children, and he calls us each day in order to embrace and encourage us, to make of us a unique and original masterpiece. Each of us is an ‘original’, whose beauty we can only begin to glimpse.”<sup>5</sup>

So yes, you are each called to greatness. But it is a greatness that you can achieve, not by having to be superhuman or by dominating others, but by being captured by the personal love that Christ has for you.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Vol. 1, xxiii.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 1 ; cited by Pope Francis in Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, Welcome Ceremony of XXXVII World Day, Lisbon, Portugal, 3 August 2023.

Dear Graduates, be sure of this: you are **gifted**, and you are **called**. But in order to discover the great hope and joy that belongs to your gift and calling, remember this one thing: Let God *encounter* you, right where you are, and just as you are. It is this encounter – between you and God – that will give constant meaning to your life, and that will lead you to horizons beyond your imagining.