

HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
GRADUATION MASS, DIVINE MERCY UNIVERSITY
FRIDAY OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF EASTER, MAY 19, 2017
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, DC

My brothers and sisters in Christ, as the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father's personal representative to this country, I wish to express His Holiness' spiritual closeness to all gathered here, especially to the graduates, faculty and staff of Divine Mercy University. I thank Father Sikorsky for his gracious invitation, and I thank all the family members and friends of the graduates who have supported and accompanied them in the work of evangelization. Pope Francis says that "an evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 24) Thank you for being just such a community – for standing by these graduates.

Truly, the mission of Divine Mercy University coincides with the mission of the Church, which is to evangelize. As Blessed Paul VI said:

"Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace...." (Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8 December 1975, 14)

Evangelization occurs in communion with the Successor of Saint Peter and the College of Bishops. In our first reading, taken from Acts, we heard the conclusion of the Council of Jerusalem. A dispute had arisen as to whether the Gentiles should be bound by certain Jewish laws. The Apostles all gathered and discerned God's will, led by the Holy Spirit. Importantly, they listened to one another and to the Spirit of God. This open dialogue, this giving and receiving, led them into the way of truth and unity. Yesterday, we heard that after some debate, Peter spoke. Peter spoke with authority as the Vicar of Christ. James, who presided over the Church in Jerusalem, concurred with what Peter had said, demonstrating a collegial spirit and a true spirit of communion. Today's reading has the Apostles appointing Judas and Silas to go with Paul and Barnabas to convey the decision, which excluded certain practices. Importantly, the message of the Apostles began: *It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place any burden beyond these necessities ...*

As a Church, especially you who will be engaged in teaching, counseling, and assisting individuals and families in difficulty, it is important that we not impose excessive burdens upon the wounded and hurting; rather, we must discern, in light of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel, how best to accompany these individuals in their journey of faith and healing.

The Holy Father uses the image of a field hospital to describe a church that goes forth; "it exists with all the equipment where people go to receive treatment for both small and large infirmities. It is a mobile structure that offers first aid and immediate care, so that its soldiers do not die. It's a place for urgent care..." (Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, New York: Random House, 52-53)

In the field hospital, we must provide urgent care, but this does not mean we lower the bar or dispense with the truth of the Gospel; rather, it means, in communion with Successor of Saint Peter, we lead individuals to discover an interior freedom so that rather than seeking freedom from the law, they can use their freedom for excellence – to strive for the higher things. This is the longer, follow-up care that must be provided. Even small victories in the healing process are important. As Pope Francis said in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "An evangelizing community ... celebrates every small victory, every step forward in the work of evangelization." (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24)

While I am confident that many small victories will be forthcoming, today is a day for celebrating a great victory in the lives of the graduates – an accomplishment which prepares them for the Lord’s service as missionary disciples. Jesus prepared the Twelve for their mission. The context of today’s Gospel is the Farewell Discourse. Jesus told his disciples to keep his commandments “*so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete.*” (John 15:9-11)

He continued by giving them a commandment: *Love one another as I love you.* But how did Jesus love them? He laid down his life for his friends. So too, as His disciples, we must be tireless in our efforts to serve our brothers and sisters. This involves not only “patience and disregard for constraints of time” but also real sacrifice. Today proposing the truth about man and woman, about the dignity of the human person, about his origin and destiny today is met with resistance. Challenging ideologies comes at a deep, personal cost. Imitate the example of the Teacher who laid down His life for His friends, giving them the perfect example of love.

After giving the commandment to love, Jesus continues: *You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything that I have heard from my Father.* (John 15:15)

In a way, this passage is another way of preaching the Sermon on the Mount. That is, the New Law is one of Love, not obligation. The New Law is rooted in friendship with the Lord. In friendship, imperatives and strict orders are surpassed by desiring the good of others in the context of love. The New Law teaches us how to live our spiritual freedom in the context of our friendship with the Lord and with our neighbors. Freed from external burdens that hinder spiritual growth, we learn that happiness is found, not in obligation and duty, but through the way love.

This is your mission as disciples and friends of the Lord Jesus – to love and to help others understand what it means to love. This is what the Holy Father challenges the whole Church to do in *Amoris Laetitia*, reminding us that: “the Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 1)

Remember the Lord’s words: *It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain.* (John 15:16) While I am sure there is sadness in parting from your professors and classmates, even those engaged in online learning, there is joy and excitement in having a new mission. If God has given you a gift by calling you during these years of study, it is important to bear fruit. As Pope Francis says:

“An evangelizing community is always concerned with fruit, because the Lord wants her to be fruitful. It cares for the grain and does not grow impatient at the weeds. The sower, when he sees weeds sprouting among the grain does not grumble or overreact. He or she finds a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bears fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear.” (Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24)

Today, we rejoice in what God has accomplished in you, and we look forward confidently in hope to see the fruit that you will bear for the Church and our world. Today’s Gospel concludes with the words “*love one another.*” The “commandment” of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be “commanded” because it has first been given. Since God first loved us, love is now no longer a mere command; it is a response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. (cf. Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 1) Therefore, in response to the many gifts you have received in these years of study, *love one another.*