

St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary
Msgr. Pablo Navarro's Commencement Address

May 7, 2009

*"As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with a
compassionate heart: (Col. 3:12)*

I would like to say to you tonight what Pope John Paul II said to the Youth of Scotland during his visit there in 1982.

He began by citing the sixth chapter of St. John's Gospel. Jesus had been teaching a crowd of people all day. It was now late and the people were hungry.

Andrew, the apostle happened to notice a boy who had five loaves and two fish. He was probably taking them home to his family for their supper. Andrew stopped the boy and asked him to give the loaves and the fish to Jesus so that he could feed the people.

The boy felt compelled to do so. And the rest of the story we all know. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish, fed the great multitude, and had 12 baskets left over.

Then, the Holy Father said to the young Scots:

"It's exactly the same with your lives...
You feel conscious of your inadequacy...
But what I say to you is this:
Place your lives in the hands of Jesus,
He will accept you and bless you...
Beyond your greatest expectations."

My friends, this is quite a milestone you celebrate this evening. "Commencement" is the embodiment of the "already...but not yet." As you fulfill the academic requirements to graduate and earn a post-graduate degree, you are handed the 'key' to a whole new realm of possibilities and to the ongoing adventure in the footsteps of Christ.

Hopefully, your intellect and your spirit has been heightened so that you may more readily recognize ...and embrace, whole heartedly, the mission ahead of you....that of communicating Christ's love and compassion, in work and action.

St. Paul writes to the Christians of Colossae: "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with a compassionate heart."

In the New Testament, "compassion" is synonymous with "mercy" and a choice fruit of "love;" the great commandment.

In case we fail to fully fathomWe read in St. John's Gospel 3:17, "for God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him."

This salvation comes about in the person of the Son...the perfect revelation of God....who is LOVE.

The challenge ahead of you, my friends...the challenge ahead for all of us, who through our common baptism, have become ambassadors of Christ...holy and beloved....is to clothe ourselves with a compassionate heart....the heart of Jesus.

The heart of Jesus open to sinners, who saw themselves excluded from the Kingdom of God by the pettiness of the Pharisees....To them he offered salvation and hope....to them He proclaimed a Gospel of infinite mercy and compassion....for those who please the heart of God are not the self-righteous but the repentant sinners, whom Jesus likened to a lamb or a drachma that was lost and found again; the Father is anxiously watching for the return of His prodigal Son and when he sees him in the distance he is "moved with compassion" and runs to meet him.

We are called to become the compassionate heart of Jesus stretching beyond what sometimes is considered acceptable in "self-righteous communities."

Living the compassion of Jesus will often call on us to be prophetic and to be the agents that stretch acceptable "customs and mores:" much like Jesus did as he encountered the Samaritan Woman at the well...and broke bread with well know sinners.

Clothing ourselves with the compassionate heart of Jesus will often marginalize us as it marginalized Jesus... only to the degree that we, like Jesus, turn our lives to God...will we find the courage and strength....to be animated on the mission to proclaim the Good News of God's love and redemption.

Mercy and Compassion, fruits of love, are the on-going requirements for the real....and final GRADUATION.

Mercy and Compassion are not always easy...nor do they flow naturally. They are often missed...or flawed...no matter...we are called to clothe ourselves with them each day...each moment of each day.

There is a wonderful little quote from Fr. Karl Rahner that I wish to share with you:

*“How often I have found that we grow to maturity
Not by doing what we like, but by doing what we should.
How true it is that not every “SHOULD” is a compulsion, and not every
“LIKE” is a high morality and true freedom.’*

Tonight, As we stand at the threshold of this entryway into the new adventure that awaits you....you have many hopes and dreams....perhaps some apprehensions and even trepidations...take courage and rejoice...the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ...and Our Father has called you by name and loves you...Place your lives in His hands...he will take you and bless you...beyond your wildest expectations!