

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BACCALAUREATE MASS FOR MOUNT ANGEL SEMINARY
SATURDAY OF THE SIXTH WEEK OF EASTER
SAINT BENEDICT, OREGON – MAY 11, 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you. It is good that we are here, to begin this day of Commencement by celebrating together the One whose life, death, and resurrection gives meaning to all our efforts and achievements. It was a very fitting prayer that we heard in the Collect for this Mass: “Trying always for what is better,” may we “strive to hold ever fast to the Paschal Mystery.” This is our Christian aspiration, isn’t it? That everything we do, every advancement we make in life, may find its meaning in our conformity to the life of the crucified and risen Christ. And so, on the morning of today’s graduations, we come to the Eucharist and say to Jesus: We want you to be with us on this significant day in our lives. We want you to show us the way.

By “holding fast” to the Paschal Mystery, which the opening prayer reminds us, we also enter into the Trinitarian Mystery. Today’s Gospel passage is situated within the extended farewell discourse that Jesus makes to his Apostles. He is preparing them for his departure. Not only for the “departure” that he will make when he goes to die on the cross, but also for that departure which will occur after his resurrection when he ascends into heaven. He is preparing the disciples for the life that they will live after he has returned to heaven, when he has sent the Holy Spirit to equip them to proclaim his Gospel with the whole of their lives.

Central to the Lord’s “farewell speech” to his closest disciples is his instruction to them about Trinitarian life. He explains to them the mystery of his communion with the Father, but increasingly he tells them how this communion, which he has had with the Father from all eternity, is a relationship into which *they* are being invited. In today’s passage, he begins by telling the disciples that “whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you”. But he ends by saying that the Father loves them so much that Jesus does not have to ask the Father *for*

them. The point is that loving and believing in Jesus makes the disciples beloved sons of the Father who, therefore, can have a personal relationship with the Father. They are sons *in Christ*.

Receiving an academic degree, as a number of you are today, is one of those transitions in life that invites reflection upon our relationship with God. All of us who have been baptized into Christ are children of the Father who are called to the intimacy of Jesus' own communion with the Father. Every time we are on the threshold of a new step in our life's journey, such as you graduates are today, it is good for us to return to the "upper room" with Jesus. We can ask ourselves, as disciples: What does this new step mean for my relationship with God? What does it mean for my relationship with others, especially those I am called to serve?

Having a new degree does not make you any more a son or daughter of God: your status as his beloved children is already firmly established. But in achieving this degree, you have applied the gifts he has given you in order to arrive at a new capacity. What does this mean for your discipleship; and in particular, how will this affect your mission to bring the light of the Gospel to others?

In order for each of us to discover the answer to this question, we do well to turn to the Father, as Jesus invites the disciples to in this Gospel. "Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.... Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." Asking begins from our own heart's desire. What have you desired in pursuing the degree that you have now achieved? For what do you hope? How do you see yourself living your vocation – a vocation which your studies have intended to serve? Ask the Father to meet your desire with his desire. Ask the Father in Jesus' name – as a child of God *in Christ* – to fulfill his plan for your life, and to help you serve those to whom your mission calls you.

Let us remember that, no matter what path the Lord leads us on, the Eucharist remains the "meeting place" between us, the Lord, and one another. The One whom we encounter here – crucified, risen, alive and present – is the One who will always reveal to us the meaning of the works we do in his name, and the further call to which he summons us. As Pope Benedict said and Pope Francis has repeated: "Being

Christian is...the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”¹ We thank God for the new horizon and the further direction that God is giving you today in your commencement.

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