

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME COMMENCEMENT MASS FOR THE
VIGIL OF THE SOLEMNITY OF PENTECOST
NOTRE DAME, INDIANA
MAY 18, 2024**

Dear Friends,

As the representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I am pleased to convey to all of you the spiritual closeness and affection of Pope Francis, especially to all of you graduates. Thank you, Fr. Jenkins, for your invitation, and for your 19 years of service as President of Our Lady's University. Many blessings to Fr. Robert Dowd as he assumes the presidency later this summer.

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Dear Graduates: It is fitting that we celebrate your commencement on this feast of Pentecost. Pentecost was the day on which the Holy Spirit empowered the Church to “go forth” in proclaiming that Christ is alive, and that all who believe in him can share his eternal life. As you graduate, you are also being sent forth. Your education has equipped you to enrich the world with the formation you have gained at this University. What do you give to the world as you “go forth”? The fruits of your academic studies, to be sure. The knowledge and skills that will make you an effective contributor to your professional field. But as a graduate of an institution whose foundation is Christ and his Church, you have the opportunity to give the world even more than that. For what is distinct about a *Catholic* education is that you have been prepared, no matter what field you enter, to offer the world the saving hope of Jesus Christ, who, having risen from the dead, is present to the human family and to each individual in all circumstances. In other words, you leave Notre Dame not only with an academic degree, but with a spiritual mission. As Pope Francis has said:

“In our day Jesus’ command to ‘go and make disciples’ echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and *all of us* are called to take part in this new missionary ‘going forth’. Each Christian and every community must

discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.”¹

Your mission is not unlike the mission of the prophet Ezekiel from whom we heard in the first reading of this Mass.² Ezekiel was sent by God into a field of “dry bones”, which represented the withered hope of God’s people who had been taken into exile. But when Ezekiel was filled with the Holy Spirit and obeyed the Lord’s command to speak God’s word to those dry bones, they came to life again. They turned into a living people ready to re-claim their identity as God’s children.

So much in our world seems like those “dry bones”. Endless wars between nations. Violence in our streets and neighborhoods. The persistent gap between the wealthy and the poor. Crimes against the dignity of the vulnerable. Our common home in need of urgent care. And in the face of all of these ills, a plague of indifference that can infect any of us. Looking at this field of “dry bones”, we can be tempted to lose hope.

But that is why we must listen to the word of God. In the second reading,³ St. Paul spoke of how “all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now,” and how even we, “who have the first fruits of the Spirit...groan within ourselves” as we await redemption. For Paul, the sufferings of this world are not reason to despair, but precisely the opposite: they are the motive to arouse our hope. “For in hope we are saved,” he declares. If, when we looked at the world, all that we saw were goodness and the fullness of life, then we would have already “arrived” at the goal of our longing. There would be no need to hope. But as Paul says, “we hope for what we do not see”. In other words, hope is our assurance that what Christ has promised – the redemption of all things – *will* come to pass. And so we, together with all creation, “groan” as if we are in labor. This “groaning” is not a cry of despair, but a prayer of hope: a prayer that peace and harmony and freedom and joy, which we all long for, will come about. As Paul says, we are not alone in this prayer, because “the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings”. That is to say:

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 20, emphasis added.

² See *Ezekiel* 37:1-14.

³ See *Romans* 8:22-27.

God is praying within us. And since this is God’s prayer, we know that it will be answered.

For our part, we are called to be like Ezekiel. To obey God’s call. To follow our vocation. To let “the hand of the Lord”⁴ come upon us, and to speak God’s word of truth and life to the “dry bones” of our contemporary world.

No single one of us can make a direct impact on every situation of suffering in this world. But each of you is willed by God to be a prophet in the place to which you are called: in the environment of your professional life, in your vocation, or in your further studies – wherever you are being “sent forth”. In the Psalm we pray: “Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth”.⁵ God hears this prayer. And he answers it by filling *us* with his Spirit and sending *us* into the world to be his ambassadors. As Pope Francis said to university students in Lisbon last August:

“I would encourage you, then, to keep seeking and to be ready to take risks. At this moment in time, we are facing enormous challenges; we hear the painful plea of so many people. [...] Yet, let us find the courage to see our world not as in its death throes, but in a process of giving birth, not at the end, but at the beginning of a great new chapter of history. We need courage to think like this.”⁶

In order to carry out your prophetic mission in the world, remember what Jesus exclaimed in today’s Gospel:⁷ “Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink.” Always remember that you have a Source of living water to turn to each day. In personal prayer. In the Eucharist. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation. All of us are thirsty, and Jesus is here to nourish us with grace and the Gift of his own Spirit. When you believe in him, then “Rivers of living water will flow from within” you. Those rivers of living water will flow to the people to whom you are sent – to the people who need your proclamation that Christ is alive, and that he is our hope of eternal life.

⁴ *Ezekiel* 37:1.

⁵ *Psalm* 104:30.

⁶ Pope Francis, Address to University Students at Universidade Católica Portuguesa; Lisbon, Portugal; 3 Aug 2023.

⁷ See *John* 7:37-39.