

**COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS OF
ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE, APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
WALSH UNIVERSITY, NORTH CANTON, OHIO
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I am very happy to be with all of you today at Walsh University for these commencement exercises. I wish to thank Richard Jusseaume, President of Walsh, for his gracious invitation. I congratulate our graduates, and I express my gratitude to their family members, professors, and all who helped bring them to this momentous occasion.

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father to this country, I wish to convey to all of you his spiritual closeness and prayerful best wishes on this special day.

It is hard for me to believe that I am at Walsh University. During my life, I have learned, step by step, that everything that happens is a gift, even if we do not always understand the gift fully when we receive it. Somehow, the gift has meaning; it gives meaning to our lives. Certainly, that is true for the gift of education.

In 1956, when my family arrived at Saint-Malo, I began high school at a school, which had been founded nearly 150 years earlier by Jean-Marie de la Mennais, a priest from Saint-Malo who was also the founder, along with Gabriel Deshayes, of the Brothers of Christian Instruction. The Brothers were founded in Brittany and their motherhouse is situated in Ploermel.

After my ordination and further studies, I was sent on various diplomatic missions. In 1995, the Holy Father appointed me Apostolic Nuncio to Haiti. There I met the Brothers and discovered the magnificent work of education that they had carried out in Haiti for many years. They were very much loved – by the poor and the elite – as they ran the very best schools.

Interestingly, upon my arrival, we began the foundation of the new Catholic University of Port au Prince. We received the valuable help and wisdom of a few brothers, among whom is Brother Marcel Sylvestre, who happens to be here today. Brother, what a joy it is to see you here and in good health, even if a bit older! You remember the struggle we had, but through you, we laid the foundations of a valuable institution which is admired and loved by the people of Haiti.

Four years later, I was appointed Nuncio to Uganda. One of the first Masses at which I was invited to preside was celebrated at the Novitiate of the Brothers of Christian Instruction in Kanywa for the occasion of their patronal feast of the Assumption (15 August 1999). This was the first of many opportunities I had to interact with the Brothers through their schools and institutions.

During these years, I came to know Father Jose Antonio Obeso Vega, the Superior General of the Order. I was becoming more interested by the whole field of education, especially by working with a number of people trying to expand the project of education of the Church. At that time, Father Obeso had written a small booklet in which he described the vision of the Brothers of Christian Instruction for Education. I found it most useful. Precisely because it was a comprehensive program of education, I began to see the importance of having an integral approach to education, especially as the world was becoming ever more fragmented and as utility was becoming the dominant criterion for education. As the Superior General of a Congregation whose charism was education, he demonstrated the value of a holistic approach to education.

It was during these years in Haiti and Uganda that Brother Marcel Sylvestre and his confreres kept telling me about Walsh University and its approach. It seemed so far away. Never did I dream that I would ever come to this university! But I am here.

Allow me to praise the many religious orders and congregations in the Church, which throughout her history, have dedicated themselves, with a wide vision, completely to the education of young people, responding intelligently to the needs of our times. I have spent most of my life at the service of the Church, now more than forty years, in missionary countries and

have witnessed the wonderful work that missionaries have carried out in various epochs to respond to the educational needs of the faithful.

The Brothers have been a gift in my life. I wish now to share something of the gift I have received from them with you. In my opinion, the need for an integral education is still very urgent in today's world. I am convinced that the Church, including all of us gathered here, still has a large role to play. This role is yours – lay people and members of the Walsh community! What does it mean to educate? First and foremost, it is an act of love, which includes obtaining certain qualifications, but as an act of love it is much more than obtaining credentials.

How can we describe this role? This is what I would like to speak to you about today. Three words – Commencement; Educate; and Reality – can help us.

Commencement – The word appears in the English language in the late 13th century and is from the Old French *commencement*, meaning “beginning or start”. In modern French, we use *commencer*. In the late 14th century, the English used the word to denote “entrance upon the privileges of a master or doctor in a university.” By 1850, Americans began using the word to refer to a graduation ceremony.

While it may seem strange to have “commencement” exercises at the end of your education at Walsh University, it really is quite fitting. As you complete your studies here, you begin a new phase in your life. Something new is on the horizon: a new field of study or new program for those going on to graduate studies; a new career; a new vocation for those considering marriage or priesthood and consecrated life. Something new begins.

Shortly after his election as Pope four years ago, when many of you were just beginning your education here, Pope Francis began his Pontificate with Mass with all the Cardinals in the Sistine Chapel. There he began something new with three words or points, in classic Jesuitical style: Journeying, Building, and Professing.

In brief, he said that “our life is a journey, and when we stop moving things go wrong. We always need to journey in the presence of the Lord, in the light of the Lord, seeking to live with blamelessness ...” He continued: “Building. Building the Church. We speak of stones; stones are solid; but living stones, stones anointed by the Holy Spirit ...” He further stated: “Thirdly, professing. We can walk as much as we want, we can build many things, but if we do not profess Jesus Christ things go wrong.” He concluded his address: “My prayer for all of us is that the Holy Spirit, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother, will grant us the grace: to walk; to build; to profess Jesus crucified.” (HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE FRANCIS, SISTINE CHAPEL, 14 MARCH 2013)

As one chapter of your life closes and something new begins or commences, this is my prayer for you as well.

Educate During these years at Walsh, you have been receiving an education. Have you ever thought about the meaning of the word *education*? The verb *educare* in Latin means to lead or draw out. This is different from other words like doctrine, knowledge, instruction, training, or schooling. Pope Benedict XVI said: “Education is not and must never be considered something purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom.” (BENEDICT XVI, ADDRESS TO TEACHERS AND RELIGIOUS, ST. MARY'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TWICKENHAM, 17 SEPTEMBER 2010)

To educate another is to help the person to be a better person: a conscious subject, free and responsible, open to the good, the true and beautiful; capable of entering into deep relationships with others - *of being with others and for others*. I know your professors and the Brothers have tried to draw out the best in you, leading you to deeper knowledge of Wisdom and Truth.

To educate means educating what is human in us. We want to educate not only the mind but also the heart. In order to educate, we must present the past in a suitable form – history and

tradition. This can be a working hypothesis or framework, which can be verified or rejected. This presentation of tradition and our past can only be made authentically if it comes from a life experience that can justify itself, that corresponds to the heart's deepest needs.

True education involves an education in *criticism*, which is not a bad thing; rather, it is something vital, essential. When a child is asked why something is true, he or she might say, "Because my mom or dad said so" or "because the teacher said so." Today, people might say, "Because the *internet* said so" or "my app said so." But there comes a point, when that type of answer is no longer persuasive. We are compelled to investigate – to ask questions. What we have always been told now becomes a "problem" for us – either to be irrationally rejected as false or irrationally kept but without maturation – *unless* we are willing to examine the problem.

True education involves examination of a problem. In Greek, this examination is called *krinein* or *krisis*, from which we get the words *critique* and *criticism*. To criticize is not to be negative but means to take hold of things – to grasp them. True education means examining things, including the Tradition, to see how they correspond with the longings of the heart and then making a judgment. This critical judgment has as its standard that which is true, beautiful, and good.

Today our world has many problems, which serve as an invitation to try to understand what we as individuals or a community are faced with and to find a solution or path – through criticism – that leads to the discovery or re-discovery of the true, the good, and the beautiful. It is through this process of education that the Brothers, your professors and advisors have attempted to shape and form your hearts so that you do not simply conform to the forces of society like those suffering under a dictatorship of relativism. They and your parents have educated you to critically and freely embrace the path that leads to life, that satisfies your heart's desire – which includes faith and community, which answer the needs of the human heart. In Latin, *satisfacere* and *perficere* (satisfaction and perfection) are synonymous. It is my hope that through authentic education, you may find happiness – satisfaction and perfection – in this life and the next.

Reality Having been educated at Walsh, you are ready to begin something new – a new engagement with reality. Reality, from the Latin *realis* or *realitatem*, came to the English language again from the French *réalité*. Josef Jungmann, the great Jesuit liturgist of the twentieth century, thought that education is an introduction to reality. Just as we spoke of a journey, so too we could say that reality is the destination; the destination is present not only in the moment the journey ends but along each step of the journey. Reality defines and structures our journey. It is also the ultimate destination, the achievement, or accomplishment, of the journey of education.

Today, the Church finds herself in a suffocating context in which ideology seeks to restrict faith to private life. When faith is not replaced by ideology and when it works in accordance with its nature in the conscience and hearts of men and women, it becomes a light that allows a person to judge reality in a distinct manner.

A Catholic university like Walsh has taught you not to yield to the trends or relativism or fundamentalism underway, both of which threaten freedom. The only things you should surrender to are love and truth. The reference points by which everything should be judged are love for truth and the truth to courageously propose the primacy of love and of goodness. The criteria for judgment could not be more clear, and without them, education collapses.

What then is the goal of your education both now and in the future? The end of education is not simply to respond to the demands of the market; rather, it is to help future generations grow in humanity, trusting in the educational proposal left to you by your elders. "To grow in humanity" means to grow in intelligence and goodness, in the capacity for being just and for solidarity, and, principally, in being open to and desiring to live and to receive Him, who is the definitive meaning of life and our final destination.

Congratulations. May God's blessing be upon each of you.