

Higher Education and the Truth

Address to Graduating Class of the
University of the Incarnate Word
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Congratulations, my friends! This is a very proud day for you. And I am honored that you have asked me to share it with you and your families.

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Agnese and the Board of Trustees of the University of the Incarnate Word for granting me the *Honoris Causa* degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. It is an unexpected honor and a source of joy to be a part of the Incarnate Word family. I'm happy to announce to you that today I'm becoming an *IUW Cardinal* and that *the Universe is mineTM* ! I'm happy to be part of the UIW Cardinals family.

Education was always very important in my family. I grew up in Monterrey, Mexico. My father was a medical doctor in Monterrey. My mother was raised here in San Antonio and she also went to college, which was not very common for women in the 1930s. My parents used to always say that the best thing they could ever do for my sisters and I was to give us an education.

I will always be grateful to my parents for that gift of my education. I know you are thankful too today for all the hard work and sacrifices your families have made to help you get your education.

Higher education is such a privilege. It is not only about getting training for a specific field. Higher education is about truth.

We all know the great drama of Good Friday. Pontius Pilate has Jesus in chains and is interrogating him. Jesus tells him that he has come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Pilate replies: “What is truth?”

This is the question of every time and place, my friends. It is a question of higher education. Pilate was not uneducated. But he was educated in such a way that he could not recognize the truth—even when the truth was standing right in front of him.

The gift of a Catholic higher education is the gift of the truth. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will make you free.” And he told us what the truth is: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life*” (cf. John 8:32; 14:6). Jesus, who is the *Incarinate Word*, tells us the truth and he is the truth. He is the truth about who we are as human beings. He is the truth about who we are meant to be as children of God.

So as you leave this fine Catholic University, you have learned what you need to know to get a job or to go on to graduate school. But you have also learned that there is more to life than the job you land or how much money or influence you can earn. Those things are important, but they are not the most important thing.

You also know that each one of you is in this world because God, in his love for you, desired you to be here. St. Augustine said that God loves each one of us like there is nobody else. You know that is true. You also know that God has a purpose for you. God has certain things that he wants each one of you personally to do in this world.

Find that purpose that God has for you, dear graduates. Always be asking, in all the circumstances of your life—whether you are at home, or at work, or studying, or in your neighborhoods and communities—always be asking what it is that God wants of you in that moment.

Now the world you are entering into, dear graduates, sees things very differently. In fact, our society today is a lot like Pontius Pilate—it doesn't recognize the truth. It doesn't believe there can even be any one truth. Our culture believes instead that there are many truths—as many different truths as there are individuals, and that it's wrong to try to decide or judge among these competing "truths."

This sounds like a very fair and reasonable way to live in a free society where there are many different religions, lifestyles, and points of view. But in practice: when nothing is true, everything is permitted.

When the only truth is that there is no truth, then we end up with what Pope Benedict has called the "dictatorship of relativism." What's right or wrong, true or false, good or evil, is decided by majority vote or imposed by powerful special interests. As a result of this dictatorship of relativism, our society not only allows evils such as abortion, it also protects them under law.

My friends, part of what God is calling you to do with your higher education is to restore the sense of truth to our society—especially the truth about the sanctity and dignity of human life.

You have to help our society see that truths and moral absolutes do exist. That the truth is always true, no matter whether any one believes it or not. That we need to conform our lives—and our laws—to these truths.

Another problem in the world you are entering is that science and technology have almost taken the place of religion. We look to science for truth, especially the truth about human nature. We are suspicious about religious explanations because there are many different religions and they don't all agree. But, we think that science is objective, that it gives us "proof."

Recently I was reading about new developments in neuroscience. Leading brain scientists now claim they have located the part of the brain in which human beings "feel" the experience of God. Others claim they have found evidence of a genetic or evolutionary basis for moral sentiments—for our sense of right and wrong; for our sense of values such as fairness, compassion, and self-giving.

These scientists are well-intentioned. But they are overreaching. You can't identify religious and moral ideas in the same way that you can isolate and identify proteins, enzymes or neural activity. You may be able to identify changes that occur in the brain when people are praying or thinking about moral questions; but that doesn't give you any scientific basis to conclude that faith and morals are nothing more than feelings, intuitions, and emotions that have evolved in the human species over the centuries.

This is another area where the world needs you, my friends. We need great scientists who are also true believers. Who can help us to understand and appreciate the beauty of creation. Who can help us to discover new treatments for illness and disease. But who remain humble enough to know that there are many things we can't know by reason and the scientific method alone.

So, my friends, you have some work to do out there in the world! Our world needs you, and God has things that he wants you to do.

I pray that you will always remember that your life is far more than a career track. It is a journey with Jesus to see God. If you let him, Jesus, the *Incarante Word*, will be walking with you in the brightness of your days and in the times of darkness, too. Deepen your friendship with Jesus, and you will find your journey filled with beauty and joy.

Let me leave you with one more thought from St. Augustine. He said: “We go to God, not by walking, but by loving” (*Letter 155*).

Love is the only way to live my friends. Not selfish love, a love that clings to things and seeks only its own pleasures. But true love, making yourself a gift to God and to those around you. This is the way of Jesus, the way that sets us free, that leads us to life and truth.

Thank you for this opportunity to talk to you today. I pray that Our Lady of Guadalupe, the mother of us all, will watch over you all the days of your lives.

Again, congratulations and GO CARDINALS!

Thank you.