



Mater Dei College Graduation Mass

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Tuesday, 22 October 2013
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Some time ago I was visiting a parish and an older lady came up to me and asked me an interesting question. She wanted to know if there were any books, other than religious books, which had had a big influence on my life. I thought for a few moments and then realized that there was one book, or at least a trilogy of books, which had really had an impact on me. I think the lady concerned was a little surprised when I told her that more than anything else non-religious that I had read, JRR Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy stood out for me as a very significant influence.

I don't know how many of you have read these books – perhaps many more of you have seen the films produced by Peter Jackson – but tonight as you celebrate your graduation, I want to offer you a few simple thoughts from "Lord of the Rings" which might provide you with some guidance in the years ahead.

Just in case you don't know the story, it is a fantasy tale about a ring of power which is a symbol of the force of evil in the world. It falls to a young Hobbit named Frodo Baggins to take this ring and cast it into the fires of Mordor, a dark mountain which is the only place where the power of the ring can be destroyed. The three volumes of the Lord of the Rings are the story of the journey to Mordor and the eventual destruction of the ring. The real power of the novel lies in the story of this journey, and the wisdom, courage and loyalty which are displayed by Frodo and his friends as they battle not only the evil around them, but also the evil within them. All of you, as you graduate tonight and end your years of primary and secondary schooling, are setting out on an equally important and challenging journey. I think Frodo and his friends might have some wisdom to offer you.

At the start of the story, Frodo's uncle, Bilbo Baggins, makes a comment to Frodo about the journey he is about to undertake. "It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door", says Bilbo. "You step onto the road and if you don't keep your feet there's no knowing where you might be swept off to." It is a salutary warning and one I would like to give to you all tonight. As you set out on this great journey which now stretches ahead of you it is important to keep your feet. You need to have a clear vision about who you are and where you are going, not so much in terms of your career path but in terms of the person you want to be. In a very significant way, each one of you has, throughout your years at school, and especially during your time at Mater Dei College,



been building yourself, shaping yourself into the person you now are. The time has come to evaluate that process and see what more needs to be done. The gospels give us a similar message. When Jesus asks us to ask, to search, to knock, he is also saying to us, “Think carefully about what you are seeking and who you are trying to be and become.” In another gospel he tells us to be people who build our houses on solid rock, not on shifting sands. If we want our lives to be all that they can be, if we want ourselves to be all that we are capable of being, then we need to have firm foundations, we need to have a solid road under our feet, we need to stand on solid ground. It is the conviction of our Christian faith, the faith that underpins the very existence of Mater Dei College, that Christ is the sure foundation of our lives. Give him the place in your lives that he deserves and that you need him to occupy.

As Frodo continues his journey, and the road gets harder and harder, he begins to regret his decision to set out in the first place. Speaking of the ring of power coming into his life he says, “I wish it need not have happened in my time”. His guide and friend Gandalf replies, “So do I and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.”

This too is a valuable piece of advice. The great task which each of us is given with the gift of life is the challenge of deciding what we are to do with the realities with which we are faced. How we confront those challenges and deal with them, integrating them into our lives and making them an opportunity for growth, will determine the real quality of our lives. This was the challenge which the first followers of Jesus faced as they tried to understand how to deal with this man who gave so much, but who also asked so much of them. Simon Peter, the leader of those first followers of Jesus, learnt the hard way that if he took his eyes off Jesus, if he allowed himself to be distracted by the worries and the difficulties of his life, if he turned in on himself rather than reaching out to others, then his life would begin to unravel – he would start to sink. It is the same for us. Jesus is the firm foundation on which we can build our lives, he is the one who can keep us from sinking – and he is the one who will hold out his hand to lift us up whenever we find ourselves overwhelmed by the struggles and challenges of life.

At the end of the story of the Lord of the Rings, Frodo discovers that he must leave his home, his family and his friends and go off into an unknown future. His loyal friend Sam doesn’t know what to do. Part of him wants to stay with his friend and part of him knows that he must remain with his wife and family. It is then that Frodo gives his friend some advice. “You cannot always be torn in two,” he says, “You will have to be one and whole for many years.” For all of you tonight the relative security of life at school, and of course its restrictions, are coming to an end. There is excitement in that and an anticipation of all that the future holds. But perhaps there is also some nervousness and perhaps a desire to stay in the safe place in which you now find yourselves. But you cannot always be torn in two. The challenge of responsibility is before you in ways that it hasn’t been before. The invitation is to embrace the future with confidence and let go gracefully of the past, while always being grateful for it. This was the challenge Mary, the mother of Jesus faced, when she realized that what God was asking of her in becoming the mother of Christ meant



leaving behind her security and her dreams and entrusting herself to an unknown future. She was only able to do so because she really did believe that God would be with her. It was his promise to her, and it is his promise to you also tonight. Commit yourself to the future with hope but also with faith: God has brought you this far and will not abandon you now – or ever.

There is one last quote from Lord of the Rings I would like to offer you. At a particularly perilous stage of the journey, Frodo is given a special gift to help him along the way. It is a glass phial containing a liquid that shines like a bright light. As he is handed the gift by the Lady Galadriel, she says to him “May this be a light to you in dark places when all other lights go out.” And indeed, in his darkest moment, Frodo opens the glass phial, and the light enables him to see his way forward.

I have spoken to you tonight of Christ as the secure place upon which you can stand and as the one who can lift you up when you are about to sink, and of God as the source of hope for your future. I want to offer you now the same gift which Galadriel gave to Frodo. I want to offer you the good news of the presence of Christ in your lives and in your hearts. May his presence, as the scriptures put it, be a lamp for your feet and light for your path, as you set out now on your journey. May he, in Galadriel’s words, be a light to you in dark places when all other lights go out.