



University of Notre Dame, Australia - Graduation Mass - Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Tuesday, 9 December 2014

Last Saturday afternoon, as I was sitting in my room thinking about what I might say to you this evening and not getting very far, I turned on the television only to discover that the film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon* was being televised. The film tells the story, in a very poetic and imaginative way, of St Francis of Assisi, the saint whose name our present Pope chose when he was elected to the papacy.

I'm not sure how well acquainted you might all be with the story of St Francis. Many people know little more than that St Francis is the patron saint of animals and has been adopted more recently as the patron saint of the environment. There is, of course, so much more to him than this, important though both of those things are.

The film *Brother Son, Sister Moon* concentrates very much on one aspect of St Francis, namely the mirror his life held up to a society, and in some ways also a Church, obsessed with power, with materialism and with wealth. Francis came from a wealthy merchant family and he abandoned it all in order to live in simplicity and poverty. In his own time, he was a reproach to a society which had lost its way. He remains so today. In this, Pope Francis is a faithful follower for he, too, is constantly challenging us, as a Church and as a society, to find the courage to confront our assumptions about what makes a society, and an individual human life, truly successful and fulfilling.

On a night in which all of you who are graduating stand at a moment of decision in your lives, I want to issue the same challenge. You have spent some of the most important and formative years of your life so far at Notre Dame University, preparing yourselves for the rest of your lives. As you now move into the next stage of your lives, what are your assumptions about what lies at the heart of a truly human, truly worthwhile life? How will you measure the success of the next few years? Will it be the size of your salary, the prestige of your position, the luxurious nature of your home or your car, or will it be something else? There is nothing wrong, of course, with a comfortable home, a secure job, a well-paid position. I am sure this is what most of you are dreaming of, what your parents are hoping for, what your friends are expecting.

St Francis would remind you, though, of what he had learnt once he committed himself to Jesus. He would tell you there are other things more important and that, without them, the home and the car and career will prove to be rather empty. When St Francis tried to express what he wanted out of life, which he did in a simple prayer, this is what he said:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.



This was his great ambition, his great dream - and he was ready to forego other things if he had to in order to achieve it.

Francis' prayer went on to spell out what it means to be an instrument of peace:

Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is hurt and injury, let me bring forgiveness and pardon. Where there is doubt, let me bring faith. Where there is despair, let me bring hope. Where there is darkness, let me bring light. Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

Behind all of this, of course, is an unspoken but vital conviction: what really matters in life is not what we have but what we are ready to give; not what we accumulate but what we share; not what we do but who we are.

So, tonight, I want to suggest that you make the prayer of St Francis which, of course, was also his commitment, your own prayer and your own commitment. Resolve tonight that you will be, for all those you encounter both in your personal and in your professional lives, an instrument of peace. Commit yourselves to bringing love, forgiveness and faith into people's lives rather than hate, offence and confusion. Be determined to shine light into the dark places of people's lives and to overcome their sadness with your own joy. Commit yourselves, in other words, to being people who make the lives of others better because they have known you.

This, in the end, is what Notre Dame stands for. This is the legacy it hopes to pass on to you. This is the criterion by which your university, now your alma mater, will measure its own success.

When tonight's celebration is over, then, go out and, in whatever circumstances you find yourselves, be, like St Francis, a living sign of the values that really matter, the values which can provide a secure foundation for a deeply happy life, the values without which our society will gradually disintegrate. And remember, like St Francis, that this kind of life, this quality of life, cannot be achieved by our own efforts alone. Francis had to first let Christ take His rightful place in his life before he could even see the value of the life he eventually chose, let alone find the courage and strength to live it. It will be the same for you. And this, too, is part of the legacy of Notre Dame. Carry it with you always. Keep room in your minds and hearts for Christ.

As I congratulate you all tonight on all that this evening's graduation celebration represents for you, my prayer for you and for everyone here in the Cathedral, is this:

Lord, make us all instruments of your peace.