



**Graduation
The University of Notre Dame Australia**

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Monday 29 April, 2024
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

Last week I had the great privilege of speaking at the launch of an app which is dedicated in a particular way to religious leaders in our community, encouraging them to be active participants in the fight against the scourge of modern slavery, and to do everything they can to encourage their people to become more aware of this terrible reality and to be well informed as to ways in which this problem can be addressed .

One of the key speakers, I am proud to say, was Professor Martin Drum, UNDA's Executive Dean for the Faculty of Arts, Sciences, Law and Business. I was thrilled to hear Professor Drum speak about the courses on offer at Notre Dame in relation to this urgent issue in our contemporary society. These courses, and the energy and passion of Professor Drum and his colleagues who are involved with him in this project, are an impressive example of the richness which a faith-based university like Notre Dame can bring to the society of which we are all a part.

In this sense Notre Dame stands solidly within the tradition of Catholic universities in Western society. The institution of the university originally emerged in and through the work of the Church and as the many centuries have gone past since universities first appeared, Catholic universities continue to be faithful to their founding inspiration.

That inspiration is grounded in what we often call the Catholic intellectual tradition, and this in turn is founded in Catholic theology as it gives expression to the Judaeo-Christian tradition which finds its origins in the experience of the Jewish people and their relationship with God. Your university, Notre Dame, is the inheritor of this long and remarkable tradition.

In fact, it is reflection on this very question of the relationship between God and humanity, and on the fruit of this reflection over many millennia, that explains the Church's concern, and your university's concern, for all those people, and there are hundreds and thousands of them, who are the victims of modern slavery. In the end, it all comes down to a question of human dignity. I think we all know instinctively that it is a shameful thing to reduce another human being to the status of a slave. In our Judaeo-Christian tradition the origins of this instinct, the basis of this



instinct, planted within each one of us by God, is the belief expressed so beautifully and poetically in the very first book of the Hebrew Scriptures, which is also therefore the very first book of the Christian Bible, that human beings are made in the image and likeness of God.

It is worth our while to reflect for a moment on just what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, God creates human beings only at the end of a long series of other acts of creation by God. Genesis presents God firstly as the creator of heaven and earth, as the creator of light and darkness, as the creator of the sun and the moon and all the stars in the heavens. God is then presented as the creator of rivers and seas, mountains and valleys, plants and trees and as the creator of all living things: birds of the air, fish in the seas, every animal that roams the face of the earth. Lastly, God is presented as the creator of human beings, and while throughout this long litany of creation, everything God creates is recognised as being good, it is only human beings - only we – whom God creates in the divine image. As we read this story carefully, we realise that what is being said is that human beings – that we - are created in the image of the God who gives life. If we are to be true to this deepest God-given identity, then we too must be creators of life. In the Bible of course, and rightly, the relationship between a man and a woman which gives rise to new life is seen as the fullest and most eloquent expression and manifestation of this identity. This is why marriage and family are so highly valued in the Christian tradition.

It is also true, of course, that there are many ways to be a life-giver, just as there are, sadly, many ways to be a life denier, a life destroyer. Reducing a human being to the status of a slave, for example, is to deny that person the opportunity and the right to live his or her life with dignity. Slavery may not kill a person physically, but it may kill a person emotionally and psychologically and spiritually. To reduce a human person to the status of a slave is to employ an act of violence against that person and to diminish their lives in a shameful and destructive way.

Modern slavery, of course, is just one example of the many ways in which we can diminish the lives of others. All forms of abuse, physical, emotional or spiritual, are acts of violence which offend against the dignity of every human person. Such abuse takes place in families, in interpersonal relationships, in workplaces, and in so many other places in our society including, shamefully, even in the Christian Churches. We need to be honest enough and brave enough to recognise these realities, and we need to search within ourselves to find the determination and the commitment to be life givers, life enhancers, life affirmers, rather than life degraders, life deniers, life destroyers.

As graduates from a Catholic university, you are graduating from an institution which draws its inspiration and the very meaning of its existence from the life and teachings of the one who said, *“I have come to bring life to all and bring life in all its fulness”* (Jn 10:10). It would be my deepest



hope that your time at Notre Dame might have given you, along with everything else which you have received from the university, a sense of the urgent need to be a supporter of the dignity of every human person, young or old, rich or poor, strong or weak, wise or foolish. The book of Genesis does not speak of categories of human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God and categories of those who are not. We are all equal in the sight of God, all deeply loved by God, all intended by God to live in ways that affirm our dignity as human beings.

This evening this is my prayer for you all: that the Lord, who reminds us in tonight's gospel that it is not necessarily the learned and the clever who always understand the ways of God, but rather those who are unsophisticated and child-like, lead all of you forward in your journey through life. You have been given the privilege of an education that hopefully does make you learned and clever in the most important things. May this privilege, the privilege of being part of the Notre Dame community, inspire you so that in everything you say and do, and in whatever career path you choose, you stand up for the dignity of every human person and be on the side of those who cannot stand up for themselves.

May God bless you all.