

Commencement Address
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology
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When Fr. Steve asked me if I would be willing to give this commencement address, I think I said "NO" before he even finished asking me the question. Then I went up to my room and I did not feel at peace about my response because it was not of God. As a Priest of the Sacred Heart what is at the heart of our spirituality is to be open and available to what God asks of us. As I reflected on what I was asked I realized that there are things that God might be calling me to share on this occasion.

When Father Leo John Dehon founded our religious community he did not give us a special ministry that would be proper to us. What he passed on to us was a spirituality that calls us to live a life of oblation in union with Jesus, to be open to do or accept whatever God asks of us with the attitude of Jesus and Mary. When the author of the letter to the Hebrews was seeking for words to put on the lips of Jesus that would express His disposition, his attitude as He entered our world, he quoted words from Psalm 40: "Behold I come to do your will..." Mary's constant disposition was: "let it be done to me according to your word." It is with those dispositions that we live our lives as Priests of the Sacred Heart, as SCJs.

So although we Priests of the Sacred Heart did not inherit a particular ministry from our founder, he did give us what our Constitutions call "certain apostolic orientations."

- 1) Eucharistic adoration as an authentic service of the Church
- 2) Ministry to the lowly and the humble, the workers and the poor
- 3) With this ministry in mind (namely ministry to the lowly and the humble, the workers and the poor) Father Dehon gave great importance to the formation of priests and religious (we have now added the laity to that)

What that means is that when we SCJs are personally involved in the formation of others or sponsor ministries that are devoted to that education and formation, our hope and our aim is that these persons (such as yourselves, our graduates), would learn from us to have in your hearts that profound desire to be especially attentive to serving the poor, the marginalized, those neglected by society. Our prayer is that, in whatever ministry you may be involved, poor and marginalized people will know the tremendous love that God has for them because you "sacrament" God's love for them by your love and ministry to them. By your love for them may they feel God's abundant love for them.

That is not something that is a high priority just for Father Dehon and us SCJs. The poor and the marginalized held a special place in the heart of Jesus. He was constantly accused of keeping company with those who were considered sinners and outside the "in" group.

There are times in the gospels that speak of Jesus being angry, but the greatest manifestation of His anger took place when He cleansed the temple. As he drove the merchants out of the temple, He quoted Jeremiah the prophet and said: "My house is a place of worship and you have made it a den of thieves." The words He chose are very significant. Yes, the building, the structure of the temple

was being desecrated, but there were other temples being violated, abused as well. Those temples were the poor people in whom God's Spirit abides. They came to the temple to worship. The only coins that could be used in the temple were shekels. The merchants made great profits by charging exorbitant rates of exchange for the foreign currency that people brought with them from wherever they had come. Furthermore, the poor who came to offer sacrifice could not bring their own animals but were forced to buy much more expensive animals that the merchants sold at the temple. The victims in the den of thieves were the poor. It was the abuse of those temples of God that angered Jesus, maybe even more than the abuse of the temple structure.

In your ministry, whatever it is, may you be attentive to the poor and if at times your anger is aroused, may it be directed towards obtaining justice for God's chosen ones who are being abused by those who have power over them and may you advocate for their rights and dignity as beloved children of God. May the poor know that they hold a special place in your hearts.

They call this ceremony we are engaged in "commencement" which means "a beginning." That's an interesting choice of words to name the occasion that marks the end of a certain period of time dedicated towards your education and formation. But it really is a well-chosen word to name what is going on this evening. It makes me think of an experience I had. I was 19 years old. I had just made my first vows and was beginning my college education in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. I wanted to learn how to drive. One of my classmates had grown up on a farm. He knew how to drive and he volunteered to teach me. We were using an old pick-up truck, standard stick shift, four on the floor, as they used to say. After weeks of practice he and I went to the bureau of automotive transportation where I would be tested. I took the test and passed. They took my learner's permit and stamped it. When I got back to where my classmate was waiting for me, he asked me to show him the permit that had been stamped. He looked at it. Gave it back to me and said: "now go learn how to drive."

Today you receive a diploma or a certificate which indicates that you have successfully completed the program here at Sacred Heart. You have done a lot of hard work and you deserve to be congratulated. What you have achieved needs to be celebrated, but you have not finished learning or being formed. Let me tell you about another experience I had that gets at what I am trying to say. I was talking with my sister Kay and she said: "You know, you have really changed." I asked: "What do you mean, Kay?" She said: "When you were first ordained, you had all the answers. You don't anymore."

Don't make the mistake I made.

The diploma or certificate you receive indicates that you have received a solid foundation, a good start preparing you for whatever ministry God calls you. I hope you go forth with an open mind and an open heart to keep learning how to be a good servant-minister of God's people. Keep taking time to pray, to be connected with God, so that the work you do is God's, not yours. Keep studying and reading, and listen to the people whom you are serving in ministry. They have much to teach us. As Karl Jung, the famous psychologist once said to his students: "If you just shut up and listen, your client is trying to make a counselor out of you." Listen to the people God calls you to serve. They can help you be a better minister to God's people.

Dear graduates, congratulations! Go out there and give God and God's people your very best. May God be with you and may you be with God.