

St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission Commissioning – May 18, 2019

Reverend Fathers, St Therese Leadership and Faculty, Teachers, Parents, and other relatives, special friends, and of course, graduates of St. Therese Institute 2019:

Last year at this time, I had the privilege of celebrating my first ST Therese School of Faith and Mission convocation. I recall in my first year of acquaintance with the school, the leadership, and the students being very impressed and inspired by the unique school it is. In my last assignment before being appointed as the Bishop of Mackenzie-Fort Smith in the NWT, I was the president of a Catholic liberal arts College in Vancouver, called Corpus Christi. Thus, I was immersed as many of us here are in the question: what constitutes a good education in the Catholic intellectual tradition?

One key feature of this is *the Quest for Excellence*. I shared this time last year at the St. Therese convocation the theme that the students at Corpus Christi College chose as their theme and focus, to represent both the College and the purpose of their student journey. It was the theme *Supervivere*. Which at first view *supervivere* means, *to survive*. But this theme was chosen because of the complexity and depth of the meaning *superervivere*: – literal meaning: “*survive*”. But, actually means: “to live”; “remember to live!”; “to live beyond life” “to live longer than”; “to outlive”; “to outlast”. It recalls the scripture from John 10:10 - “I have come so that you may have life, and have it abundantly!”

This meaning has a profoundly Christocentric meaning and refinement of what our world might limit *excellence* to mean in our current culture. To be excellent as a Christian man and woman is not being (really!) better than others in the sense that our only term of reference is myself in relation to how someone else performs, or achieves. Our view of excellence is about a profoundly Christian view of both the person and the human community. In this sense, my journey of

excellence is bound up with the same journey of others. AND, it is shaped and led by the author of our humanity – the Lord of the Universe – who boldly leads us realizing and celebrating a vision that is *in this world, but not of this world*. In other words, we seek – eternity. And in this journey, our lives now, matter!!

All of this can and should get very practical. My excellence is related to yours. I am hardly excellent if I do not help you to be excellent. The life of St. Therese shows as that we need to resist the temptation which began in the Garden of Eden after the Fall, to deny being *fully human* and to compete with God, but rather, embrace our God-given humanity especially by focussing on excellence in *little things*, especially *mundane* things.

This quest to define ‘excellent education’ continues. Probably because of the developments and crises in the world just over the last year, people and nations are questioning many things, including the real value and contribution of education. And what is surfacing by many higher education – that is university and college - presidents and principals - is that good education is about education of the whole human person – mind, heart, soul ... seeking truth and beauty, and the way of being really and fully human – including that of generosity, compassion and service.

For example, just last week, the President of the University of British Columbia, Dr. Santo Ono, was speaking at St. Mark’s Theological College in Vancouver. He was addressing the theme a good liberal arts education as a significant and crucial contributor to higher education today, because of its emphasis on *being wise by following the way of the heart*. He highlighted the motto *Tuum Est*, (which is also on the UBC coat of arms). It is a double entendre. *Tuum Est* means *it is yours*. This is legitimate, all be that such an interpretation is somewhat utilitarian. Dr. Ono went on to share a secondary meaning: *Tuum Est* means *It is up to you!!* He stated that this meaning refers to the blessing and

gift of education and formation, which is to make a significant difference for good in the world. The blessing, the gift of having great education is a privilege, AND can only be grasped if you have a liberal arts education. *It's up to you ...* to use that knowledge for helping others, to address the most vexing challenges of the world versus merely using it for your own advantage. *It's up to up to you* to realize the blessings given to you and not to other, *it's up to you* whether you make the right decision – large or small – to be in service to others. He stated that that this is a message that needs to be impressed on students ...when they arrive ...and when they leave.

I was struck by this point of the entrance and departure of students. I immediately thought of the students of St. Therese who I have come to know over this past year – and some of you the past 2 years. Frankly, I have seen much growth in you. It has been a privilege to get to know you. And I say to you – along with the teachers, staff, and Board of St. Therese – and I am sure also your parents and family – it is so good to have had you here and to celebrate this day. And as there is a time to enter St. Therese – there is a time to leave St. Therese – and to hear God's call to you to take what you have received and learned from St. Therese forward into your lives, as you continue to discern God's call and journey for you ahead.

I now go back to the comments of Dr. Ono last week. He went on to describe “education of the mind.” This is the kind of education that is received in laboratories, business schools, and technical institutes. But education of the liberal arts goes well beyond merely this. Education is not just about being able to integrate information from multiple fields and to be able to think critically, or to go beyond memorization to original thought – these are legitimate and important in a liberal arts education. But the primary reason that the liberal arts education is perhaps more important than ever before – is because it is through the study of history, civilizations long past – of beauty, such as music and art – and thinking

about how art moves you, very difficult philosophical question - that you get a different kind of education. Not an education of the mind, but an education of the heart and soul. When you have to make a tough decision – always go with your heart, not with your mind. This will best put you on the path to being truly wise.” (I have never heard this kind of statement from a President of one of the largest secular universities in the world - UBC has about almost 60,000 students!)

When I hear this explanation from Dr. Ono, I am hearing meaning of ‘education of the heart’ that is not merely appealing to the popular notion of the heart as a place of emotion. As I shared here last February at the Winter Institute, the ‘heart’ in our Catholic education and spiritual tradition means much, much more.

As summarized in the CCC #2563,

“The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.”

A vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation and ‘heart’ of any spiritual path or journey. And this relationship is at the foundation of how we come to learn about relationship with others, to appreciate Creation and our role in it, and to know how to honour and serve the work and mission God gives to each of us.

When I hear comments about the qualities and purpose of true education and formation, I am thankful for the unique and prophetic contribution of St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission. Because, the experience here is not only one of academic formation, but also human and spiritual formation ...a formation that leads to deepening Christ-like JOY and HOPE. This is greatly needed in our world today. I point out that human and spiritual formation is now the focus of new requirements for formation and preparation for the Priesthood. Indeed it is vital for all vocational paths.

It is no wonder that Pope Francis stated in his exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* that JOY is a preeminent feature of the Christian life, and come from a vital and personal *fully and truly human* relationship with the Lord. As he states:

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting Him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: “Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace.” (3)

JOY is what happens when we *risk* and *trust* in the friendship of the Saviour. Joy is the effect of taking up the greatest adventure of our lives with the One who gives everything, if we dare to give ourselves. Joy is a way of the heart, and an interior state of our souls that effects... well, ...everything!!

I thank St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission, in truly uniquely proposing to its students not only a liberal arts education, but an education and formation that seeks the way of excellence as an issue of gift and talent; of abundance and responsibility... to God and others; and of the willingness to be a part of the greatest adventure that any person could ever have ...of walking in the way of Jesus Christ, seeking full communion with the God of the universe through the path of holiness and righteousness!!!

I conclude with the inspiration that comes from the choice of your 1st Reading today In the prophet Jeremiah, we hear,

“Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” But the Lord said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, Do

not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.” (see Jeremiah 1)

This reading reflects the inspiration and message of Pope Francis’s recent exhortation for young people and all the Church, “Christus Vivit - Christ is Alive”
The Pope has a bold and challenging message for the Church. As he states,

“Let us ask the Lord to free the Church from those who would make her grow old, encase her in the past, hold her back or keep her at a standstill. But let us also ask him to free her from another temptation: that of thinking she is young because she accepts everything the world offers her, thinking that she is renewed because she sets her message aside and acts like everybody else. No! The Church is young when she is herself, when she receives ever anew the strength born of God’s word, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in our lives” (35).

The Holy Father goes on to call young people to a unique and God-given path that is prophetic and very needed in our world of today. He states,

It is true that “as members of the Church, we should not stand apart from others”, yet at the same time, “we must dare to be different, to point to ideals other than those of this world, testifying to the beauty of generosity, service, purity, perseverance, forgiveness, fidelity to our personal vocation, prayer, the pursuit of justice and the common good, love for the poor, and social friendship” (36). The Church can be tempted to lose her enthusiasm and revert “to seeking a false, worldly form of security. Young people can help keep her be young” (37).

Let us remember that Jesus Christ carried out his public life, mission, and ministry as a ‘young person’ – between the age of 30 to 33. Might this indicate to us a key message for us all – and certainly to you, the graduates of St. Therese – Jesus Christ calls us and all the Church to a youthful vitality and vigour which boldly seeks the fullness of fullness of God’s vision and renewal for the world. May we never become tired or disengaged from this – because of seeming setbacks or new challenges and obstacles. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence ever alive and active in our world, inspiring in our lives new ways to respond with faithfulness, vision, vitality, and zeal. Indeed, let us all hear the words of the Gospel you chose for today,

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. (see John 15)

In a few weeks we celebrate Pentecost Sunday: the Feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit on God's people. This is a day when we celebrate how Mystery comes to humanity – how God's people are to *become like God precisely by sharing the gifts and blessing the God's gives His people so that they can bless, heal, and build upa hungry, searching world.*

So, Graduates, Live! Live Well. May I propose *Supervivere ...Survive, Live, Live beyond!...* Seek excellence ...in all things. Also, *it is up to You! To make a significant difference for good and blessing in the world.* We need you. God calls you. I thank you ... for your generosity and openness to God's deepening call to you, and for hearing and following the call. *Continue the journey into Mystery – His Mystery!*

God bless you, and congratulations!