2015 Baccalaureate Mass  
Mount Aloysius College  
Remarks of President Tom Foley  
May 8, 2015

Good afternoon and we welcome all of you to Mount Aloysius College—some of you honored visitors and some of you in your last week as students on this campus.

I have four quick assignments here—let me get right to them.

First, thank you Father Mark. We are grateful for your trips down to celebrate Mass with us on many Sunday evenings, and for joining us on this day as we celebrate our 189th graduating class in our 162 years as an educational institution.

Welcome to all our guests with us today at Mount Aloysius—where it is 162 years since seven Sisters of Mercy came from Dublin, Ireland to these Allegheny Mountains, 117 years since the main building opened its doors and first welcomed a priest of this diocese.

Father Mark and family and friends of our graduates, we also welcome you to this place with such an extraordinary sense of mission. A lot has changed in the physical plant of the College in the last 162 years but the core values of the Sisters of Mercy--mercy and justice, service and hospitality--still rule on these grounds.

There is an extraordinary commitment to service at the Mount,

- where immigrants of all persuasions got their first education,
- where 59% of our current students are the first in their families to have the chance for higher education
- where 82% of our students work at least part time while pursuing their education and
- where 100% of our students volunteer in the community during their time here, including over 800 students this past year who performed almost 12,000 of service on over 200 projects with more than 160 different community partners.

Finally, we welcome all of you to Our Lady of Mercy chapel--where God’s light has been shining through these same stained glass windows for almost 100 years—the very thought just takes your breath away—

- That same reflected light has brightened the hearts of over 19,000 students who have passed through these same pews
Second assignment, thank you to our support cast arrayed in front of me.

Thank you Andrea and Sister BJ—for helping us to focus on what truly matters in this liturgy—as you have all year. And thank you Sister Eric Marie, Sister Giuseppe, Sister Charlene who keep us so focused on mission by their example, their mentoring and their teaching.

And thank you parents, spouses, children, grandparents, significant others—all of you who helped these graduates get to this point in their lives. “It Takes a Village” isn’t just the title of a best-selling book. We know that for many of you it is the story of your education, that so many people helped you to get here, and many of you have your “team” here with you here in the Chapel.

And we applaud you and all the partners who helped motivate and guide you to this day—your parents and siblings, your friends, your teachers, your classmates and for some of you, your children.

Friends and family with us this afternoon, someone once said that “if the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is 'thank you', it will be enough.” Hoping that it is enough and on behalf of all our students, we are grateful to you who helped guide them to this moment. So we thank you.

Third assignment, a few words on the anointing with oil that we are about to experience in eight locations around this campus.

We are here today to mark the impending graduation of all our health sciences students in a way that is practically unique to Mount Aloysius. When you leave this building, you will regroup across the campus with others in your field of study, where you will literally be “anointed” with special oil.

The English word "anoint" comes from the Latin word meaning "smear with oil." It appears in more than 150 scriptures passages. Oil was used and still is used for special consecration services and for setting aside someone for special service.

The Psalms speak of the “oil of gladness”; David was anointed with oil as a sign of his special mission as King of Israel, the Good Samaritan anointed the man beaten by the robbers, pouring oil on his wounds to heal them. In Scripture,

- Kings were anointed at their coronations;
- Athletes were anointed before races and games;
- Priests and prophets were anointed as a sign of their consecration for special ministries to God’s people.

And we use oil today in sacraments—Baptism and Confirmation—as part of ordination and for the sick and dying.

Tonight, we will anoint the hands of our students

- as a literal consecration of their life’s work in the healing arts
- as a sign of their joy in the completion of their studies, and
- as a source of strength and healing for the journey ahead.
In a very real sense, the ceremony you are about to experience is our Mount Aloysius way of consecrating you to your good work, and of sending you off with a blessing from all of us, a blessing that you can literally see and feel, touch and remember.

**Last assignment is to bring you back to where it all started.**

Our mission at Mount Aloysius is not simply to prepare you for a job, but to help prepare you for life. It is no accident that you heard the college statement of philosophy so often while you were here. One more time:

> *Mount Aloysius College provides a setting in which students are encouraged to synthesize faith with learning, to develop competence with compassion, to put talents and gifts at the service of others and to begin to assume leadership in the world community."

You have all done some of that during your time here, or you wouldn’t be sitting here about to graduate. Your challenge is to take those lessons about a “life well lived,” as well as a “profession well practiced,” out with you into your world—and let others learn from and admire your example.

A true story. Long line of traffic clogged Main Street in Allentown, PA. As usual during rush hour, cars were honking impatiently at each other. The person who wrote this story to Reader’s Digest was riding in a car with her sister. Her sister, who was driving, stopped and signaled to a florist truck to go ahead and turn in ahead of her.

A block later, when the traffic was stopped at a red light, the rear door of the truck opened. Out jumped a big, burly workman. He strode to the window of the car, tipped his cap, and handed the astonished woman a large red rose.

At Mount Aloysius, we want our graduates to be like the woman who drove the car and also like the workman who gave her the rose. Whether it’s at the hospital, in the classroom or on the shop floor, we want our graduates to use their heads *and* their hearts as they move through life, in effect “to synthesize faith with learning,” “to develop competence with compassion,” and “to put their gifts at the service of others.”

At the end of the day, our aspiration is that the Mount Aloysius nurse is the one you hope is on duty when your child goes for treatment.

Our aspiration is that the Mount Aloysius prison warden is the one who started the parenting program for the incarcerated.

Our aspiration is that the Mount Aloysius lawyer is the one who does *pro bono* work because she wants to, not because she has to.

And it is our aspiration that our graduates always seek to understand what it is like to be in the shoes of the person on the other end of that care or transaction, at that all too human intersection where wants and needs meet help and hope.
One last story—this one about a woman who invited a group of friends to dinner. She was a little flustered, afraid she had invited too many people.

At the table, she turned to her six year old daughter and said, “Would you like to say the blessing?”

“I wouldn’t know what to say,” the girl replied.

“Just say what you heard mommy say,” the woman replied.

The little girl bowed her head and said, “O my Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner.”

Father Mark, I don’t recommend that as the closing prayer, but we do very much hope that you and all our guests in this chapel will join us for some refreshments after the anointing and pinning ceremonies.

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Congratulations to each of you. We are grateful for the years you spent here with us on this campus, and for the quiet moments here in the chapel. You brought hope with you when you first came onto this campus, and now you take hope back out into the world with you as you leave.

So even as you turn to leave us tomorrow, please know that before you are even off this campus, we will be missing you and calling you back. So don’t be strangers, and know that you have always a home here at Mount Aloysius.