Mount Aloysius College  
All College Liturgy  
September 25, 2014  
Remarks of President Tom Foley

First, let us thank this choir. They sounded pretty good for a group that had exactly 20 minutes to practice with Music Director Nancy Way!! We thank you, Nancy; and thanks to our brand new Director of Campus Ministry, Andrea Cecilli; to our terrific “cantor-for-the-day” Amber Lenhard; and to our three instrumental musicians.

Second, today’s readings focused on gifts—of wisdom, of discernment, of spirit, of faith, of healing, of vision—all gifts central to our appreciation of The Good life—which is our yearlong theme this year at Mount Aloysius. And I want to spend a few minutes focused on the gifts brought to this college by the Sisters of Mercy.

But before we get to that, just a quick story. A postal worker comes across a letter that is addressed to God. He was fairly used to getting letters addressed to Santa Claus but this is the first time he’d ever had one addressed: “To God.” He decided to open it and found the following, “Dear God, as you know this has been a particular tough year and we are not able to get any gifts for our son Jimmy. If you could see your way to sending us ten dollars that should be more than enough to ensure a happy Christmas for Jimmy. Thank you.” And it was signed.

The postman was so moved by this letter that he took out another envelope and wrote “From God” on it and took all the money that he had in his wallet—which was six dollars—and put it in the envelope and stuck it in the mailbox.

You can imagine the next day how excited he was to see if there would be any response. He opened the box and sure enough there was a letter to God and in the letter it said “Dear God, thank you so much for listening to our plea and reaching out to help us. Though I know I asked for ten dollars I want you to know there was only six in the envelope. And I know exactly where the other four dollars went…those SOB’s at the Post Office.”

Well, I know that’s how it is sometimes in your life. No matter how much good work you do there’s always some guy (your College President) telling you that you are going to need to do more; as in, “The Good Life” is about much more than the dollars in your bank account.”

It is my assignment in these last five minutes to tell just a little of the story of the Sisters of Mercy, who never stop putting metaphorical dollars into our envelopes—and who brought us to this very place today.
In the intercessions after the gospel today, we joined together and prayed for those who are suffering from poverty, from unemployment, from homelessness; we prayed for all those caught in the crossfire of conflicts around the world; and we prayed for all at home who remain caught in the downdraft of the economy. We prayed that we might embrace the spirit of the words from another gospel, this one from Matthew, whose words are very simple and very emphatic—

“Whatever you do for one of these least brothers of mine, you do for me.”

You all know these words. I’m not sure that there are more powerful words anywhere in the gospel. “Whatever you do for the least of my brothers or sisters, you do for me.”

Kindness is truly the universal language. It is also the language most often spoken by the founders of this institution—in its fabric to this very day.

Let me say something about each of those two statements.

First, kindness is the universal language. In my first four years on this campus, I have seen of lot of that language spoken on this campus.

- By the over 75 students who went on mission trips last year to Guyana and to New Orleans, to Philadelphia and to Appalachia
- By the over 100 students who helped out with our latest Haiti project, which will send another ship’s container of supplies to kids who will be over the moon to receive them
- By our almost 200 student athletes whose teams performed 27 community service projects last year, and received top honors for their good example at the AMCC Annual Meeting
- By the 800 plus students who performed 11,998 hours of community service last year, working on 250 projects with 166 different community partners
- By all the students and staff who step up officially as tutors and unofficially as mentors, because they have high hopes for each one of you
- By all the faculty members who go the extra mile—and then some—in and out of the classroom because they believe in each one of you
- By the five different Sisters of Mercy who volunteer so many hours here—and who chance by my office on a regular basis—and let me know they are each praying for me.

Robert Frost once said that “poetry is what gets lost in the translation.” I hope that these daily acts of kindness—a poetry of the spirit, if you will—continue to replicate and multiply here at Mount Aloysius and long after you leave. These acts of generous spirits, of kindness—are contemporary examples of Matthew’s gospel verse—“Whatever you do for the least of my brothers (and sisters!!), you do for me.”

So there is lots of poetry and kindness on this campus—and it is all prayer. And kindness is truly the universal language.
Second kindness is also the universal language of the founders of this institution, and is at the very core of their, and our, mission. Mercy and justice, service and hospitality—they frame the lifework of the order and they are the core values in our own mission statement.

We are in the midst of Mercy Week on our campus, when we celebrate the history and emulate the accomplishments of an incredible group of women. They say that imitation is the highest form of flattery, and all week, we have been honoring the accomplishments of the Sisters of Mercy by trying to imitate them. At Mount Aloysius, we will celebrate the extraordinary commitment of these remarkable women by performing acts of service on our campus and in our community, as part of our Connections classes, on our sports teams, in our clubs and organizations.

You know, there are almost 10,000 Sisters of Mercy in the world today, serving in 47 countries, in over 1000 cities and towns and villages across the globe, in places like Guyana and Guatemala, Panama and Peru, Chile and China, Uganda and the United States, and of course where it all started on Baggot Street in Dublin, Ireland.

In America alone, there are 3,684 Sisters of Mercy, another 3,264 associates and over almost a thousand Mercy Volunteer corps alums who live out the gospel. The Sisters of Mercy do that by founding and operating over 100 schools from Australia to Belize and from Ireland to the United States, including our own College—and 16 others like it in this country. They also live out today's gospel by founding and operating more than 50 full-service health care systems, more than 60 homeless shelters and orphanages, and dozens of long term care facilities and other social service networks that tend to the needs of the “least” of my brothers and sisters. These modern day angels of mercy and justice, of service and hospitality perform corporal works of mercy on behalf of the poor, the uneducated, the afflicted and the desperate.

Science tells us that you can live for about 40 days without food, that you can live for about three days without water and that you can live for about eight minutes without air. But it is very hard to live even one second without hope, and these extraordinary women who took up the cloth of Sister Catherine McAuley over 180 years ago have made it their business—their life’s work—to bring hope, now in 47 countries around the world, in 44 states here at home, in over 500 cities and towns in America.

We in this college are among the most fortunate beneficiaries of these extraordinary examples of how to “live a life” for the “least of my brothers.” 202 women have entered the Sisters of Mercy since the community in Cresson was founded more than 150 years ago. More than two thirds of those spent some part of their ministry with us on these grounds, and many others as well. And we have had over 300 students receive Mercy Service Grants at Mt. Aloysius, and 183 of our students have won Mercy Presidential Scholarships, 27 of whom are in the audience today.

It is a remarkable body of work, one that exemplifies the essence of the “good life,” and that deserves our praise, our adulation, our emulation. Sister Helen Marie Burns, Sister Guiseppe DaBella, Sister Charlene Kelly, Sister Benedict Joseph Watters, Sister Eric Marie Setlock—would you all please stand. Sisters, we thank you for showing all of us how to live the Gospel every day of your lives.

Thank you.