



**The University of Notre Dame Australia (Fremantle) Graduation  
Homily**

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
Monday, 12 December, 2016

Because of the way our academic year is arranged in Australia, our graduation Mass for Notre Dame will almost always fall in Advent, a time when everyone is caught up in the often hectic preparations for Christmas and a time when Christians are hopefully also preparing themselves spiritually for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

It is a time when all Christians turn their minds to a figure who in fact, in our Catholic tradition, is central to our faith all year round: to Mary, the mother of Jesus. We will see her depicted, together with her husband and her newborn son, on countless Christmas Cards, in Christmas cribs, and in films and TV programs. She will feature, too, in many of the Christmas carols we will hear and sing: "Silent Night", "The Little Drummer Boy", "What Child is This?", and many more.

For students, graduates and staff of Notre Dame, of course, Mary has special significance. Your university, our university, is named for her, "Notre Dame, "Our Lady", and tonight we are gathered here in our Cathedral, St Mary's, dedicated to her and especially to her Immaculate Conception.

For all these reasons it is appropriate that we have chosen to celebrate the Mass of Our Lady of Guadalupe, which happens to occur today, December 12.

Many of you will be unfamiliar with the story of Guadalupe, although those of you who have a Latin American heritage will certainly know of the story of that appearance of Mary to a poor Mexican peasant, Juan Diego, on four occasions from December 9 to December 12 in 1531.

I will have to leave it to you all to google the details of the story when you go home. Tonight I simply want to say that this is one of the most important recorded appearances of Mary throughout the last two thousand years largely because she appears not as a young Jewish girl but as a pregnant local indigenous woman. This image of the lady of Guadalupe can still be seen, nearly five hundred years later, in the basilica dedicated to her in Mexico for it is an image which appeared miraculously on the inside lining of the young Juan Diego's cloak.

That Mary appeared at Guadalupe as a local woman has been taken ever since as a symbol of the truth that Christianity is not tied to any particular culture or race but belongs to every culture and can and wants to be at home in every culture. Christianity was a new and, so some said, a foreign European religion in the new world of the Americas. Mary's appearance gave the lie to this. Christianity was as local as the brown skin and facial features of the people whose ancestors had lived there for countless generations. Her appearance to Juan Diego enabled people to



believe that what was important to them was important to God, what was precious to them was precious to God, and what was of concern to them was of concern to God. And all of this of course is as true today for all those who call Australia home as it was for the indigenous people of Mexico five hundred years ago.

Sometimes we can fall easily into the trap of thinking that our Christian faith is somehow alien to our own culture, out of place in contemporary Australia, perhaps little more than a relic from the past. Certainly many people today live a life of practical atheism, in which the very question of God is regarded as supremely unimportant, or totally irrelevant to the day to day business of living. The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe should give us pause. Christianity has shaped our world, our culture, our values, and our intellectual traditions in ways which we sometimes forget. We do so at our peril. Society needs to rest on something solid if it is not to drift aimlessly. To use the words of the gospel society needs to be built on solid rock if we want it to withstand the wind and rain. If it is built on shifting sands and it will quickly fall.

The values that underpin the University of Notre Dame will provide you who are graduating with such solid foundations, if you are open to receive them. The extent to which you carry those values with you into the future will be the measure of how successful Notre Dame has been as a truly Catholic university. It will also be the measure of the integrity of the life you are building for yourselves and those you love. Every one of us constructs our lives, either implicitly or explicitly, on some form of world view, some understanding of what constitutes a life of worth, of dignity and of integrity.

If we find our worth and dignity in the amount of money we earn or the number of things we acquire, then this will determine ultimately how we live our lives and how we make our decisions. If we find our worth and dignity in the extent of the power which we can wield over others this too will shape our lives and our relationships. And if, instead, we find our worth and dignity in the ways in which our lives contribute to the well-being and happiness of others, then our lives will look very different.

This is the challenge you are all facing. You have the opportunity to show that the values of the gospel are as at home here in Australia as the Lady of Guadalupe showed them to be in the sixteenth century pagan culture of the new world. It will not always be easy. The Christianity of sixteenth century Mexico encountered a culture which, although rich in many human values, was also deeply distorted in many ways. The culture of the gospel, which has hopefully underpinned all that you have experienced at Notre Dame, faces the same encounter today in Australia: a culture, and a way of life, which is rich in many human values, but in some respects has lost its way: it has wandered into the paths of materialism, of excessive individualism, of a selfish determination to maintain our own privileged way of life no matter the cost to others, of a forgetfulness of God, of a disdain for all that is not perfect. Like Jesus himself your challenge is to affirm, rejoice in and celebrate all that is good about Australia, while at the same time not being afraid to confront all that is dehumanising and unworthy of us. This will require courage and sacrifice - it cost Jesus his life - but it is the most precious gift Christians can offer our world today.

My prayer for you all is that your time at Notre Dame has prepared to rise to this challenge with enthusiasm, with determination and with faith. I invite you all to join me in praying for this tonight.