



The University of Notre Dame Graduation Mass 2017

HOMILY

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Archbishop of Perth**

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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I am not sure how familiar many of you are with some of the traditions of our Catholic faith, but I am sure you all know that for us as Catholics Mary, the Mother of Jesus, plays a very important role. This will come as no surprise to you, of course, given that you are here tonight graduating from a University which bears Mary's name: Notre Dame - Our Lady.

It is appropriate therefore, that we are celebrating this Mass of Graduation in this Cathedral which, like your university, is dedicated to this great woman. We refer to the Cathedral as Saint Mary's, but its full title is the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. It is also appropriate that we are here tonight celebrating, with the whole Church around the world, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This feast commemorates the appearance of Mary to a young man in Mexico in the sixteenth century. This was the time of the Spanish conquest of the Americas, a conquest which brought the gift of Christian faith, but also brought great cruelty, on the part of many of the conquistadores, towards the native Indians of the lands they conquered. Mary appeared to that young man, Juan Diego, not in the form of a European woman, or a Middle Eastern woman, as Mary in reality was, but in the form of a native woman of Juan Diego's own people.

The message was clear. Christianity may have come to this new world from another place and culture, and may indeed have come to some extent in a tainted and disfigured way because of the cruelty of the conquerors who brought the faith with them, but Christianity in its truest form was as much Native American as it was Spanish, as much at home in the new world as it was in the old world of Europe, and we might add was and is as much Australian as it was and is European. Jesus steps into our world and reveals the face of God to everyone, because Jesus, through his life, his words, his deeds, his teachings, and of course through his death and resurrection, shows us what God is like and shows us what it means to live a truly human life - no matter where we live, or where we come from.

Jesus comes to us in time, of course, because a young Jewish woman, engaged but not yet married, was visited by an angel, a messenger from God, who asked her if she was willing to respond with faith and courage to the most amazing, and daunting, and mysterious invitation ever offered to a human being: was she willing to become the Mother of the Messiah, the Mother of the child who would be the living presence of God among us?

Like Mary you too now stand before the unfolding of your lives. Like her you too may discover in yourself a call to greatness, a call to extraordinary generosity, a call to launch out into an unknown and uncontrollable future. Life in fact invites us all to greatness. Life holds out great promise for all of us. Life will always stretch us, calling us to be more than we ever thought we could be.



How will you respond? Will you find within you what you need to be, and become, all that you can be?

One of the reasons we in our Catholic tradition look so often to Mary is because she models for us what it looks like to respond with courage to life. She also helps us to understand that responding in this way doesn't always come easily. When Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, the gospel account tells us that she was at first very frightened. This is often our first reaction to something we don't understand or can't make sense of. Because of Mary's fear the angel seeks to reassure her and explains exactly what it is that God is asking of her. Hearing this Mary's fear turns into confusion. What she is hearing doesn't fit in at all with what she had imagined her future would be. *"How can this possibly happen?"* she asks. *"This is way beyond anything I had planned or dreamed for myself."*

When this kind of thing happens to us - and it will surely happen to each of you in the course of your life, for life is always unpredictable - we can feel overwhelmed, or confused, or simply not up to the challenge. It is at such times that the strength of our faith will show itself. To reassure Mary the angel said, very directly, to her, *"the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow"*. What the angel was saying of course was that Mary would not be alone if she accepted the challenge and followed the path God was laying out before her. Rather than having to rely on herself, she could place her hand in the Lord's and allow him both to accompany her and to lead her. And because she believed, which is to say because she trusted, Mary reached deep into herself and discovered that she could say, with confidence and hope, *"Here I am the servant of the Lord. Let God's will be done in my life"*.

Tonight's Mass is an essential element of your Graduation from a University which proudly knows itself to be grounded in the Christian faith as it is expressed in our Catholic tradition. At the heart of this faith and this tradition is the absolute conviction that the God who has revealed himself to us in and through Jesus has created us for greatness, loves us passionately and unreservedly, looks on us with compassion and tenderness, and is constantly seeking to draw us to himself so that, in him, we will really discover what it means to live life to the full. Mary, that great woman of faith, has been given to us by the Lord so that we can learn from her how to believe, how to trust, and how to live with courage and integrity. We turn to her tonight and say to her, as so many generations before us have done, *"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us. Pray for us now. Pray for us at the hour of our death. Pray for us always."*