



## *Baccalaureate Keynote Address*

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*University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, California  
May 12, 2011*

My Brothers and Sisters, especially you, my Dear Graduates:

I am so pleased to be here! What a privilege to be able to join you at this great time of joy for you! Thank you for your kind invitation!

As many of you know, I have been in Los Angeles now for almost one year. I have been the Archbishop since the beginning of March.

I have to tell you: I am still amazed by this city! I think I always will be. The liveliness and energy, all the diversity of languages, religions, cultures and lifestyles; this is truly a cosmopolitan place, a city of the world.

The Catholic Church that I serve here is like a microcosm. The Church here is really what the Church is meant to be — *una familia de Dios* -- one family of God drawn from every country, race and language. We have almost 75 ethnic and national groups in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and we celebrate the holy Eucharist and minister to people in more than 40 different languages.

So I know very well: I'm not in San Antonio, Texas anymore.

My young brothers and sisters: You are about to graduate and commence into a big world. Going to school here in Los Angeles gave you a good taste for what this world will be like.

Life is a wonderful adventure. I pray that you live your lives beautifully, with love and enthusiasm, with joy, confidence and hope.

Wherever you are called to, wherever the pathways of your life lead you — you have to stay grounded. You have to keep the faith! You have to stay true! True to who you are! True to who God made you to be!

There is a great story about Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

People used to travel to India all the time to see Mother Teresa. They came to volunteer. They came to help her in her ministries to the poor and the dying.

One of them was Morris Siegel. Everybody called him “Mo.”

Mo Siegel was the founder of Celestial Seasonings, the big herbal tea company.

In the 1960s Mo was kind of a hippie. He dropped out after taking a few classes in college and he opened a health food store near Aspen, Colorado.

He and his wife used to pick wild herbs for their own tea. They would put the herbs in little muslin pouches and then brew tea with hot water. They thought other people might like to buy these herbal tea bags. That’s how the business was born. And it took off.

In 1984, Mo sold Celestial Seasonings to the giant food company Kraft for about \$40 million.

Mo was a philanthropist. He wanted to be engaged in the world, he wanted to help people in need. He started a number of non-profits and he gave money to all kinds of humanitarian groups.

Still he was restless, he could not be satisfied.

So traveled to Calcutta to see Mother Teresa.

He told her that he was planning to leave the business world and devote his life to volunteering and undertaking projects to help the poor.

Mother Teresa told him to go back home and to do good where he was. She poked him in the chest. She said to him: “*Grow where you’re planted.*”<sup>i</sup>

That is important advice — for Mo Siegel and for all of us. But I think these words are especially important for you, my young friends, as you begin your new lives in the world.

*Grow where you’re planted.*

You are in this world for a reason! God has a plan for each one of your lives. He has something that he wants you to do. Wherever find yourself “planted,” wherever you find yourself in this life, you must seek God’s will for you.

Wherever you find yourself, remember: *God loves each one of you very dearly* — as if there were no one else in the whole wide world but you.

Sometimes I think this is the hardest thing for people to believe in — God’s personal love for us. We think that this world is so big, that the universe is so vast — how can God possibly care about every one?

But he does, my friends! God cares for you very deeply.

Jesus said that a sparrow does not fall from the sky that our heavenly Father does not know about and care about. He told us that every hair on our head is numbered in our Father's loving eyes. He said that each of us has a guardian angel in heaven who beholds us before the face of God.<sup>ii</sup>

Blessed Mother Teresa used to say this: "When God created us, he created us out of love. There is no other explanation because God is love. And he created us *to love and to be loved*. If we could remember that all the time, there would be no wars, no violence, no hatred in the world. So beautiful. So simple."<sup>iii</sup>

That's what it's all about! That's what we're here for. To love and to be loved. It *is* beautiful. It *is* simple. If only we would remember this and believe this.

Wherever you are "planted" my friends, even if you are only going to be there for a little while, you must *love and be loved*. That means, like Mother Teresa said, we have to work for a world in which there are no wars, no violence, no hatred.

This starts in your own hearts. Keep working every day to be less selfish, to think less about yourself and more about others.

Try to do everything for love. Even the little things you do every day. Offer them to God. Say, "God I want to do this for you. I want to do this for my friends, for my neighbor, for my family."

My young brothers and sisters, you have a responsibility now to play your part in God's plan for the world. He created this world to be a great city of love and truth, a culture of life. By your love you must build his civilization of love.

Strengthen families and build friendships among all peoples. Work so that every human life is welcomed and cherished — from the child in the womb to the person who is old or handicapped, to the immigrant who comes seeking a new life for his family. Make this world a place where no one is a stranger to love.

We are all a lot like Mo Siegel. We are all born with restless hearts.

We want to live life to the fullest. We want to make a difference in the world. We have longings in our hearts that we know material things alone will never satisfy. We want to know holiness, joy, and peace.

These are beautiful impulses. God made us to know all of these things. What every one is seeking, whether they know it or not, is God. We are made so that we will find our happiness and the true meaning of our lives only in him.

Many centuries ago, St. Augustine wrote: "Lord ... you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you."

Augustine knew what he was talking about.

He was a highly educated man, a professor, but he was very self-centered. He had a lot of appetites and desires. He dabbled in fringe politics and strange religious ideas. He had a child out-of-wedlock. He didn't treat women very well, or anybody else either. He was too selfish.

Then one day, Augustine found God while he was reading the Scriptures. He had a conversion of his heart. He went on to become one of the most important saints in history.

No one who knew him when he was 30 years old could have ever imagined that.

And this is very important, too, as you go out in the world. Remember: Our God is a Father of tender mercies. And he is also a God of redemption. Never forget that. No matter what happens, you can always come back to God. As St. Augustine did.

So if someday, you find yourself traveling a bad road, you can turn always stop and go back. You can seek the grace to change your life.

Jesus said: “*Ask*, and it will be given you. *Seek*, and you will find. *Knock*, and it will be opened to you.”<sup>iv</sup>

He is talking about God's love and mercy. God is always there to hear your prayers. He will always be there to welcome you into his love again.

So these are some reflections for you this afternoon, my young brothers and sisters.

You are setting out on a beautiful adventure. Go with God. Go in love.

Know that he loves you and that he has a plan for each one of you.

Grow wherever he plants you. Grow in his love and in the love you show to others. Make your lives something beautiful that you give to God and to everyone around you.

I will pray for you, my young brothers and sisters. And I ask the Catholic patroness of this great city, Our Lady of the Angels, to pray for you also.

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<sup>i</sup> Scott, *A Revolution of Love: The Meaning of Mother Teresa* (Loyola, 2005), 61–62.

<sup>ii</sup> Matt. 10:29–31; 18:10–11.

<sup>iii</sup> Mother Teresa, *Where There Is Love, There Is God* (Doubleday, 2010), 6.

<sup>iv</sup> Matt. 7:7.