



Homily – Baccalaureate Massⁱ

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Archbishop of Los Angeles*

*Thomas Aquinas College
Santa Paula, California
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President McLean, Dr. Kelly and members of the faculty; Mr. Wensley and members of the Board of Governors; Father Buckley and Father Raftery; distinguished graduates; all of you my dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I am so happy to celebrate this Holy Eucharist with you on this joyful occasion.

This is a day for joy! I rejoice with you, dear graduates!

Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in the Gospel today: “I have told you these things, *that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be complete!*”

Joy is what should make us different as Christians, my brothers and sisters!

And joy must be the mark of our discipleship, and *the means* of our witness in the world.

Each one of us is called to bring others to Christ through our own joy at our salvation and eternal life! We are to be messengers of the joy that comes from knowing the hope of his resurrection!

It is fitting that we are celebrating your graduation today on the Feast of St. Matthias.

He is chosen to succeed the apostle who betrayed Jesus, as we hear in today’s first reading. This is only place St. Matthias is mentioned in the New Testament.

Tradition suggests that he was one of the 70 who Jesus sent out to heal the sick and proclaim the Gospel.ⁱⁱ

This could well be true, because as we hear today, St. Matthias was one of the men who accompanied the apostles throughout Jesus Christ’s public ministry — from his baptism until his ascension into heaven.

Tradition says that later St. Matthias helped to evangelize Armenia and that he returned to Jerusalem and died as a martyr around the year 51.

But we don't really know. And that is a beautiful example for us, in its own way.

For each one of us is called to be a faithful witness to the teachings and the deeds of Jesus Christ. We are called to be faithful witnesses to his resurrection and to the difference that the resurrection makes in our lives.

Let us pray this morning to become saints like St. Matthias — saints that no one may ever know about, except the people who are close to us, the people we live with and work with.

By our prayers, our teaching, and good example — and by our joy — let us bring many people to know Jesus Christ.

My friends, our nation and our world are waiting for a new encounter with Jesus Christ.

You know this from your own experience. Among your friends and family, among the people you meet in your work and in your communities.

People sense that there is something more, some greater joy and happiness that awaits them — if only they could find it.

We know what they are looking for. We know *who* they are looking for. We know that this joy, this happiness that they seek, has a name and a face. It is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the heart of this fine school — as he must be the heart of every Catholic college.

Jesus is the *Logos*, the divine Reason through whom the universe is created. He is the Truth and Wisdom of God.

In him we find not only the unity of knowledge, but we also find the fundamental harmony of faith and reason, truth and freedom, justice and mercy, beauty and wisdom.

But Jesus Christ is not an abstract principle. He is a divine person. He is the one who calls us by name. Who calls us to friendship.

“I have called you friends. ... You did not choose me, but I chose you. And appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.”

These are beautiful words to describe our calling as his disciples.

Our friendship with Christ is rooted in his calling, in his love.

Our Lord has given us a new commandment, my brothers and sisters, the commandment to love as he loves.

We are to love through the complete gift of our selves. We are to deny ourselves and to live for the love of God and the love of our brothers and sisters.

This reminds me of a story of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. I hope you know her life. She was truly a saint sent by God to be a special witness for our times.

One day, Mother Teresa found a woman on the streets who was covered in sores and was very sick. Mother Teresa took her in and started cleaning her up. The whole time, the woman kept yelling at her, swearing at her.

The woman yelled: “Why are you doing this? People don’t do things like this. Who taught you?”

And Mother Teresa said, “My God taught me.”

That made the woman quiet. Then she asked, “Who is this god?”

Mother Teresa said: “You know my God. *My God is called love.*”

That is the God who teaches us, my friends. The God who is called *love*. Jesus is our Teacher in all the ways of this God. In all the ways of love.

And we learn by our imitation of Christ. We learn by loving as he loved.

Our lives are not our own, my friends. We have been bought at a great price — the blood of God’s only Son, shed out of love for each one of us.

What can we possibly do to repay such love? What can we offer back to God in return? Nothing less than our own lives. That is the love that Jesus calls us to today. He calls us to serve him in our love for one another, and especially our love for those most in need.

This is the meaning of this Eucharist we celebrate. In the Eucharist, we ask that our Father accept the gift of our lives, along with the bread and wine, in thanksgiving for the love he has shown to us and for the praise and glory of his name.

My prayer for you, dear graduates, is that you grow always in this Eucharistic spirituality.

Everything you do, even the smallest duties and the littlest things in your day, if done in faith and with love, can be offered up. This is the spirituality of the saints.

Try to do everything for love. Even the little things you do every day. Offer them to God. Make them “spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”ⁱⁱⁱ

What a beautiful world it could be if we all lived solely for the love of God and the love of our brothers and sisters!

The world needs your discipleship, you faithful witness to his resurrection, dear graduates.

The people of our day long to know what you have learned here at Thomas Aquinas College. They want to know what St. Augustine called *gaudium et veritate* — the joy that comes from knowing the truth!^{iv}

You have learned your lessons well. But your faith and your education is a gift that you have been given to share.

Now is the time for the sharing! You are being sent out, my brothers and sisters. To be disciples of Christ! To be messengers of his joy! To bear fruits of love!

Our Lord is calling you to his friendship. He is calling you to tell the world of his love — a love that is stronger than death!

He wants to touch every one with his love. And he wants to use you, each one of us — to be instruments of his love.

So rejoice today, dear graduates!

My prayer for you is that you will always strive for the truth in love.

I pray also for this fine Catholic college, that you be always renewed in the spirit of your patron, St. Thomas Aquinas, who devoted his life to the service of God.

St. Thomas once said: “I envisage, as the main duty of my life, the working out of my debt to God in such a way that I express him in my every word and attitude.”^v

Let that be our prayer this morning too. Let us seek to express Christ in our every word and attitude.

And I ask Our Blessed Mother, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom, to help you always walk in the paths of his love!

ⁱ Readings (Feast of St. Matthias Apostle): Acts 1:15–17, 20–26; Ps. 113:18; John 15:9–17.

ⁱⁱ See Luke 10:1; Ruffin, *The Twelve* (Our Sunday Visitor, 1997), 169–171.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Pet. 2:5.

^{iv} *Sermon* 43, 9; *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, 5.

^v Gomez, *Men of Brave Heart* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2010), 126.