2013 Baccalaureate Mass Homily

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Members of the Class of 2013 chose these readings, especially the Gospel, because they fit with their experience here at Holy Cross, the theme of "Growth." When they came to campus, at their First-Year Academic Convocation in St. Joseph's Chapel, a list was read out, naming their accomplishments so far. They also placed a stone in the sanctuary, as a remembrance of the actions of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who placed his sword at the foot of the Black Madonna at Montserrat, leaving behind his old life, and taking up the life of a pilgrim. So these new students became pilgrims for these four years, and like that mustard seed, they have added to their accomplishments and grown as a community, with diverse talents, and dreams.

They have been watered by the wisdom of professors. One student learned "just how caring professors can be. I used to think that they were mainly concerned with just school and grades, but have found mentors that have helped me in completely unexpected ways." As a multicultural peer educator, this student also appreciated the diverse cultures here at Holy Cross in events like Noche Latina and CASA Culture Night.

This is a class that came to know something about service. They traveled to Appalachia, Honduras, Belize, Jamaica, Kenya, to discover what the world was like elsewhere. They planted themselves abroad in China, Peru, Sri Lanka, France, and Spain, and England and Ireland, to be immersed in the soil of a new culture that allowed them to see the world from a different point of view.

One student who planted herself in Belize, did not grow, at least physically. She tells me, "I'm still 5'0. But in working with my 8th graders in Belize I realized it doesn't matter if I'm the shortest person in the classroom (even as the teacher). My capacity to give back and feel compassion has grown so much taller."

One student even tried to imagine what was deeper under this soil, as he went for a late night walk in the Jesuit cemetery, kneeling down in front of the crucifix, praying for guidance and help in the next four years, looking out over all of the graves of the Jesuits who had lived and died at Holy Cross, and were the foundation of the College. He fell asleep, and scared the living daylights out of two students walking by. But while I hope he was inspired by the Jesuits who had passed on, I hope he was inspired by some of us who are still alive!

One student was transformed from an intimidated midshipman to become a confident leader as the battalion commander of the unit, knowing that further growth will help develop her into an even stronger leader after commissioning. Growth in leadership is something that flourishing here at Holy Cross.

One student noted that when she came to HC she was preoccupied with "creating a plan for myself" — but professors and friends encouraged her to take risks and challenged her to do new things. She studied abroad, participated in Spring Break Immersion with L'Arche, joined SGA, participated in the five-day Ignatian Exercises retreat, and the biggest risk of all ... majored in something that wasn’t "practical." Let me know if that risk pays off!

One student told me that she came here as a step along the way to becoming a doctor. That dream continues, but, because of her experience of the poor in Jamaica, including cutting women's toenails at Mother Theresa's home for the abandoned, she now feels more drawn toward medicine-rather than driven in a competitive self-seeking way. It is not just about the prestige and honor of simply being a doctor, this journey means so much more.

One student came here searching for riches, fame and glory, but a trip to El Salvador, working with SPUD in Worcester, and the D.C. semester helped this student realize there was something more important, to follow one's heart, wherever that leads. His heart leads him to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps to be planted in a year of service. He may not make millions, but if he does, we'll be in touch.

One student came from a military family and so moved every 2.5 years. And HC became a home. As the family got off of 290, "I didn't know what I was feeling exactly-fear, excitement, everything. But, once we started up College Hill, all that fear dissipated. Balloons everywhere, those "Live the Mission" T-shirts on people's backs," Orientation leaders, alums, and Jesuits helping carry her bags into Mullody. "I knew my Mom wasn't just dumping me off in central Mass. I knew I had people that cared about me. Holy Cross truly was a home-with people to love and care about you. She found comfort in community during the Sandy Hook shootings and the Boston Bombings, and praying with "Rabbis and Imams, Catholics, Protestants, Hindus and Buddhists as we began this semester." She was part of a community that said goodbye to one college president, and said hello to a new one.

Another student looks back on four years, and how they helped him grow into young adulthood ... "Despite the distractions of schoolwork, clubs, organizations, athletics, and long lines in Kimball, I have learned that God is in all the small, everyday things we do and not just at church or on retreat. Just like the smallest mustard seed, all of these activities we do blossom into the largest tree, and this is how Holy Cross had taught us to live as we move out beyond the Hill."

Tomorrow, graduates will leave here with a diploma from the College of the Holy Cross. Take the wisdom that you have gained here, and place it at the service of God and humanity. March from Mt. St. James, and be planted in the world. Although it is a world that is broken by violence and division, use your wisdom to try and make this world whole again. Go, be planted, grow, and flourish.