

**Donnelly College Convocation Mass
Cathedral of St. Peter
September 1, 2016**

I

Invoking the Holy Spirit

It is a joy and honor to offer the Mass today for the intentions of the students, faculty and administration of Donnelly College. This College is one of the most cherished jewels of our Catholic community.

The Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas serves the Northeast quadrant of the State of Kansas with more than 100 parish communities. A few years ago, the priests and people of the Archdiocese made an extraordinary 10 year commitment to provide Donnelly College with \$400,000 annually – half of which is dedicated to financial aid for students and the other half to the capital needs for maintaining and improving the physical facilities of Donnelly College. This commitment of precious, limited resources reflects how important Donnelly College and more importantly, dear students, how important you are to our Catholic community.

It is a great joy, in partnership with so many other people of good will in our community, to be able to offer you the opportunities that higher education opens up to you. We want each of you to succeed, not just in your studies at Donnelly, but in life. It is our earnest prayer that through God's grace that each of you can develop the talents and gifts God has fashioned in you, so that you can first and foremost glorify God and secondly you can provide for yourself and your families.

We want to provide you with the opportunity to develop the necessary tools for you and your families, not just to survive but to thrive. We are committed to doing what we can to prepare you not to be just great citizens, but visionary leaders for Kansas City and whatever other communities you some day will call home..

Through this Mass, we call down upon you the Holy Spirit to inspire your efforts – keeping you focused on your studies, despite life's many and alluring distractions; giving you strength and energy when you grow weary; providing you peace when the pressure of exams, papers and everyday life threaten your tranquility.

II

Gratitude to Administrators, Faculty and Staff

I want to speak a special word of gratitude to your President (Msgr Stuart Swetland), Donnelly's Vice-Presidents, faculty and staff. Thank you for devoting your time, energy and talent to making Donnelly College an excellent and unique institution of higher learning. On more than one occasion, I have heard Msgr. Swetland note that Donnelly College this past year was recognized amongst its peer institutions as being rated first by its students for classroom satisfaction.

This is a consequence, dear faculty, of your commitment to do your best to provide every student with the tools and assistance they need to succeed. Never compromising academic excellence, Donnelly has been known throughout its history for the individualized support it provides to each of its students.

III

The Partnership of Faith and Reason

The university and college system, that has become such an important part of western culture and civilization, grew out of the Christian culture of the Middle Ages. It was the Church who initiated and granted charters for the majority of universities in the Middle Ages, when the college and university system came into being.

It was the Church more than any other institution at the time that demonstrated a vibrant interest and commitment in providing educational opportunities. Still, today it is the Catholic Church that sponsors and operates more schools than any other institution in the world. It was Catholic monasteries that preserved precious books and texts. The Church for centuries, for two millennia, has valued the importance of education for the human person. Catholicism has always believed that Faith and Reason are not competitors and certainly not enemies, but rather partners sharing a common goal – the pursuit of Truth.

It is more than ironic the cultural perception today that science and religion are incompatible. In fact, many of the great scientific advancements were the fruit of Christian scientists, many of whom happened to be Catholic priests, such as Nicholas Copernicus, Roger Bacon, Albert the Great, Nicolaus Steno, Francesco Maria Grimaldi, Roger Boscovich, and Georges LeMaitre, who first proposed what is today popularly known as the “Big Bang Theory” for the beginning of the universe.

IV

Christian Conviction of the innate Dignity of the Human Person

The purpose of Donnelly College is not to proselytize students, striving to convert them to Catholicism. It is rather to assist students to pursue the true, the good and the beautiful. The existence of Donnelly College is a concrete manifestation of our Catholic conviction of the innate, God-given dignity of each and every human being. We believe each human person is uniquely made in the Divine Image. It is this belief in the inestimable worth of each and every human being that drives our commitment at Donnelly College to help each student discover their gifts and to assist with the development of those gifts to the fullest extent possible. We do this as a way of glorifying God the source of all good gifts and helping our students experience the abundant life and complete joy God desires for you.

V

Catholic Education: Feeding the Mind and the Soul

While Donnelly College is an academic institution and therefore devoted to assisting their students develop your intellectual gifts and abilities, we also strive to assist our students to also grow spiritually by offering them opportunities, such as this morning for prayer. In our second reading, St. Paul writes to the Christian community at Rome about the importance of prayer that is led and guided by the Holy Spirit.

We want to provide you opportunities, not only to know about God, but to know God through a life of prayer, where you can learn to listen to God's voice in your hearts and become comfortable speaking from your hearts to God words of gratitude, praise, repentance, intercession and petition. Moreover, we believe that an essential component of education is exposing students to authentic beauty that by its nature inspires and elevates the Spirit.

Many of you are visiting our Cathedral of St. Peter for the first time. I hope you are enjoying its beauty. In our Catholic tradition, we have striven to build beautiful churches. Our motivation is not to feed our human pride on what we can humanly accomplish, but rather to attempt to build to the best of our ability, a place that expresses our desire to give God our best, our first fruits. Though we know we can never construct anything truly worth of God's glory; nevertheless we try to do our best to honor God by making beautiful places where He makes Himself uniquely present to us. We want our churches to be places that elevate our minds and hearts to God.

We also believe that the development of knowledge without a similar development of virtue is actually dangerous. Knowledge can be used for good or evil, to help or to hurt others. We believe knowledge that is combined with virtue is a powerful force for good in the world. Freedom needs to be tethered to truth and knowledge must be guided by virtue

VI

Preparation for the Real World

While Donnelly College's faculty and staff are committed to do everything they can to help students to succeed, they are not here to coddle you or to make you dependent upon them. Donnelly College seeks to equip students to be able not only to survive, but to succeed in a world that can be hard and at times unforgiving.

We want to help you develop the interior strength to overcome difficulties and adversities which you know, all too well, are part of life. We want to prepare you for the world as it is, not as we might like it to be. At the same time, we want to help you become agents for change in the world. We want our Donnelly College Students to make a mark on the world, making our world better by your lives.

VII

Parable of the Talents – A Meditation for the Beginning of an Academic Year

Our Gospel today, the Parable of the Talents, is appropriate for the beginning of an academic year. Part of the mission of Donnelly is first to help you uncover and discover your talents and then to help you develop those talents to the maximum degree possible.

In the Parable, Jesus says that the man gave to each of his servants according to their abilities, giving the one with more ability – more responsibility. It is very possible that we believe the Lord has given us one talent, when He actually has given us five or 10 or perhaps even 100. Sometimes, because of our previous experiences in life, the amount and quality of our talents may have become obscured or hidden. We want to help you first to know yourself, to know your abilities and your capacity for growth

God did not entrust whatever gifts He has given to us to be returned unopened or unused. He desires us to develop our gifts and talents to the maximum degree possible. He wants a return on his investment; not because He is an evil and greedy God. No, just the opposite! He made us not to stagnate or vegetate. He wants us to grow and prosper for our own good, but also for the good of others.

Our Church, the Donnelly College Board, our many community partners, the benefactors of the College have all chosen to invest in you. We believe that you are worthy of that investment. The ultimate return that we desire is not that you become active alumni and future benefactors of Donnelly College, although our Development Department would certainly welcome this. The ultimate return for us is to play a part in you being able to live happy and fruitful lives, lives that will make our community and the world a better place.

VIII

Made In the Divine Image

It is our conviction that God, the Creator, of the cosmos has made us in His divine image. If this is so, then He made us to be creative as well. Each of us has the ability, not just to survive – to make it through life, but actually to make the world better and to make the lives of others better because of us. Whatever gifts or talents the Lord has given to us, they are the raw materials that He desires for each of us to develop. Whatever your talents and aptitudes, you have been created to a difference for good in the world.

Whether you are called to be an artist or a scientist, an educator or a nurse, an entrepreneur or first responder, an accountant or an athlete, a community leader or communicator, a human relations specialist or customer service rep, you can make the world better. By using your gifts in the class room or the board room, in the laboratory or the hospital, the office cubicle or the check out counter, the performance stage or the athletic arena, you can give glory to God and serve others.

IX

College Is a Place to Form Friendships for a Life Time

The most important institution for the future of our society, our community, our nation and our world is the family. Family is constructed on fidelity to commitments and bonds of love. Some of the most important parts of the college experience do not happen in the classroom or library. College affords you the opportunity to develop relationships and friendships that are formed as you share this common experience of seeking to develop and grow your gifts.

With everything else that we pray for you today, we ask the Lord to give you a love and concern for your fellow students. We pray, as you share this common challenge of learning and developing your talents, you will also grow in your capacity for love and authentic friendship. We pray that you will develop during these years empathy for others and the capacity for faithful and committed love that does not seek to use another for pleasure, but seeks the good of the other person over and above our own personal wants and desires. It is the development of this capacity for true love that will equip you to be great husbands and wives, fathers and mothers.

X

Conclusion

May God bless each of you as you begin this academic year! May it be a year of grace and growth for each of you! One of the highlights of every year is attending the Donnelly College graduation. I look forward to celebrating on that occasion with many of you and your families the successes and achievements of the coming year. May God bless our faculty and students in coming year! May you taste that special joy that comes from hard work and using our talents well to glorify the One who is the source of every blessing! Amen.