

Molloy College Commencement Mass

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

May 16, 2021

To the Molloy College Class of 2021:

I want to congratulate you, your parents and families, and your Molloy College Mentors, Faculty, Administration and Staff, and our founding Dominican Sisters of Amityville as you celebrate Eucharistically this milestone of the completion of your degree and the commencement of a new and bold horizon in your life.

Your time as Molloy Lions and your pursuit of Study, Spirituality, Service and Community have been filled with so much that is good, but too, your Molloy College years have seen much upheaval – from the pandemic to political, economic, employment and societal upheaval.

Your Catholic faith has been a solid foundation and anchor for you through it all and will continue to be.

In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John we heard this evening, Our Lord Jesus:

- 1) Asks His Holy Father to keep us in the Father's name and to keep us one as the Father and the Son are one;
- 2) Jesus protects and guards us "in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled";
- 3) Jesus wants us to share His joy completely;
- 4) Jesus consecrates us in truth as He Himself is the Truth;
- 5) Jesus insists that we "do not belong to the World" but that he sends us on mission into the world and for the world.

As missionary disciples in the mission of mercy of the holy Catholic Church to the world, we proclaim with joy, compassion, mercy and freedom the truths of the

Gospel, the truths of the Creed, the truths of the Sacraments and the truths of our Catholic moral teaching.

To be consecrated in truth is to be liberated.

Catholic Universities and Colleges are called to witness to the objective truths of our Catholic Faith in freedom. With your Dominican motto “Veritas” – Truth – you know this. The truth makes us free to witness to our love for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit boldly and humbly!

Academic freedom in a Catholic University or a Catholic College is grounded in exploring, illuminating and sharing the objective truths of our Catholic faith. It is a mission of Catholic evangelization and what Pope Benedict XVI calls “intellectual charity.” As we know through our experience of history, the dictatorship of moral relativism enslaves. Objective moral truth liberates.

To be consecrated in truth makes us joyful and makes us one in Christ and one in communion and mission with the Church that Christ founded.

As Catholics, we know well the four marks of the Church. The Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. John 17 gives a firm foundation to these four marks of the Catholic Church and its unity in truth and charity.

As we celebrate this Commencement Mass with you, we celebrate that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are leading and guiding you and that the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ are launching you into the world of work and this new horizon and stage in your life.

You are called to be consecrated in the truth about what the Church teaches about work and your missionary role in the world of work. It makes sense at this Commencement to reflect on these truths as you enter the ever-changing and ever-“Zooming” world of work. These truths are the anchor and foundation of your future work contributions to the mission of the Church and the world.

The life-giving teaching of the Church on human work is meant to reach every dimension of the human person: soul, body, heart and mind, imagination, and our ultimate destiny.

No other theology, philosophy or theory of work comes close to what the Gospel proposes. Others not only all fall short but many have, in their truncated understanding of the human person and human work, caused much damage throughout history.

Indeed, many philosophies of work, when examined, are best seen as expressions of a culture of death. We can look at a few examples.

The tragic and horrific history of slavery in the United States reflects deeply warped philosophies and ideas of the human person and the meaning of human labor.

In Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Ebenezer Scrooge voices a philosophy and theory of work when two men approach him for a donation to the poor on Christmas Eve. As they describe the trials of the poor in London in an effort to persuade Scrooge to be generous, Scrooge asks: "Are there no prisons...are there no workhouses?"

His dismissive punch line to the persistent men is an echo of the utilitarian philosopher Robert Malthus (1766-1834): "If they [the poor] would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population." This approach has disturbing echoes in the utilitarian philosophies that treat the so-called economically unproductive — due to age, disability or other reason — as unworthy of life or that seek to reduce the population of developing nations in order to increase the "demographic dividend."

Twenty-first century consumerism is another expression of a defective philosophy of work. Pope Francis and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who contemplated frenetic Long Island North Shore consumerism in his 1925 novel, *The Great Gatsby*, agree that when consumerism drives our theories of work it always distorts the theories and the practice. The underlying premise that our self-worth and human dignity are defined by our net-worth results in tragedy and self-destruction in all its variety of expressions

Unbridled capitalism, in which profit becomes the sole goal of an enterprise, in which monopolies form driving out competition no matter the human cost, in which the economic sector is not circumscribed within a juridical framework that ensures

it serves the good of employees, customers and society, similarly reveals a woefully inadequate approach, something that Pope Francis calls an “economy that kills.”

The contemporary workaholic is living out a philosophy and theory of work that makes work a false god, a golden calf, an idol that can erode and destroy one’s marriage, family and faith life.

In the context of competing ideas, the Church proclaims the splendor of truth about human work that is meant to lead us through our labor to holiness on earth and ultimately to eternal life.

Holy and virtuous work is also by its nature missionary, giving light to the world.

In this Year of St. Joseph proclaimed by our Holy Father Pope Francis, St. Joseph the Worker summons the best from you, the Molloy College Class of 2021 and your work.

St. Joseph the Worker is also an important intercessor for you as you discern what God is calling you to do with the gift of your life, as well as for people of all ages making important decisions about their career or development.

Sometimes this discernment can go off course. A desire for wealth, unreasonable expectations of family members or distorted peer influences, the desire for prestige, influence and power can obscure and block the discernment of what gifts, talents, interests, drives and skills God has given us and how best to invest these gifts.

Stephen Covey (1932-2012), the author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, once said that a person can climb the ladder of “success” for decades and find at some point in middle age that the ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall the entire time.

St. Joseph can intercede for us that the ladder we climb will be the ladder of God’s will set upon the wall of God’s glory and the salvation of souls.

The Church and our globalized society are in desperate need today of teachers, manual laborers, technology professionals, doctors and health care professionals, civil servants, lawyers, politicians, financiers, accountants, social workers, venture capitalists and homemakers who have all radically laid down their lives for Jesus

Christ and who desire to serve His people and his Church by bringing holiness into the work.

Through his example and prayer, St. Joseph the Worker helps us develop the virtues of maturity, reliability, responsibility, industriousness, integrity, initiative, self-sacrifice, teamwork, optimism, humility, contemplative concentration, and charity in our labor.

He inspires us toward a Catholic ethical compass grounded in the Ten Commandments and the moral virtues of prudence, fortitude, justice and temperance.

He helps us develop a sense of poise, effectiveness, a sense of humor, and what Pope Francis calls “creative courage”¹ in handling crises and challenges so that we may turn crises into grace-filled opportunities.

Molloy College Class of 2021:

May you be consecrated in the truth of Jesus Christ and His Church. May this truth set you free and provide the ethical compass for you to make trail-blazing missionary contributions in your own unique world of work as you discern your career path, your vocation and your life.

May the Holy Spirit lead you and guide you. May the Word of God be a Light and Lamp for your steps on earth. May your radical fidelity to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and the Sunday Catholic Mass lead you to great horizons of holiness and mission. May a burning desire for Heaven and Eternal Life guide every decision you make on earth. God bless you!

¹ Pope Francis’ December 8, 2020 Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde*.