

Address by the Pro-Chancellor Msgr. Albert Pampillon at the Graduation Ceremony of Strathmore University on 14th September 2007

Your Excellencies,
Honorable Authorities,
Faculty and Students of Strathmore University,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

A graduation ceremony is always a joyful celebration. Solemnity does not take away the joy that the possession of something good brings with it. We rejoice with the new graduates in their achievement and in their prospect of beginning a new stage in their life. We wish them success in building up a better world with the knowledge and skills they have obtained and that today we recognize and approve.

When taking note in my diary and setting aside this morning for today's graduation ceremony, I realized that our celebration of the new graduates was going to coincide, according to the calendar of the Church, with the celebration of the Triumph of the Holy Cross. This happy coincidence makes the day especially joyful and gives us the chance to speak a bit about the Cross. Let us not forget that the Cross, the Holy Cross is the sign of Christians, the place where Christ won our salvation, the altar of sacrifice, the throne from where he reigns, the sign plus for addition, a condition for resurrection and life, and therefore an object for our veneration. In fact, at Strathmore University on every 14th of September, the solemn blessing with the *Lignum Crucis* is already a tradition and today is not going to be an exception. For those who may not know it already, a *Lignum Crucis* — the most important Christian relic — is a little piece, a splinter of the cross where Jesus Christ died. The one we have and will use for the benediction in the evening was a gift of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. Yes, with the Cross and the sign of the cross we bless and are blessed.

All of us whether we are Christians or not may benefit from the truth about the Cross, from learning the lessons taught by the Crucified and Risen Christ. Whether we like it or not, whether we understand it or not, life entails suffering, life and love mean sacrifice, life and sorrow walk together. Only by contemplating the mystery of the Cross and reading in the book of the crucifix we can be happy at all times.

Our Chancellor, Bishop Javier Echevarría cannot be physically with us today as he was in last year's graduation ceremony. He is praying for us today. Let me read some paragraphs from a letter he wrote to us at the beginning of this month.

“One cannot follow Jesus without denying oneself,¹ without cultivating a spirit of mortification, without the habitual component of specific deeds of penance. The Holy Father pointed this out, some months ago, when he announced a year dedicated to Saint Paul on the bimillennium of his birth. He stressed that the apostolic fruit of the Apostle to the Gentiles could not ‘be attributed to brilliant rhetoric or refined apologetic and missionary strategies. The success of his apostolate depended above all on his personal involvement in proclaiming the Gospel with total dedication to Christ; a dedication that feared neither risk, difficulty nor persecution. ‘Neither death, nor life,’ he wrote to the Romans, ‘nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (8:38-39).’

’From this we can draw a particularly important lesson for every Christian. The Church’s action is credible and effective only to the extent to which those who belong to her are prepared to pay in person for their fidelity to Christ in every circumstance. When this readiness is lacking, the crucial argument of truth on which the Church herself depends is also absent.’²

These considerations will help us to prepare for the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on the 14th of this month. Saint Josemaría held up for us the great goal of placing the Cross of Christ at the summit of all human activities—with our sanctified and sanctifying work—so that Jesus might draw all men to himself.³ Let us realize well the urgency of this task — and here Bishop Echevarría quoted again the Holy Father: ‘How many people also in our time are in search of God, in search of Jesus and of his Church, in search of divine mercy, and are waiting for a ‘sign’ that will touch their minds and their hearts! Today, as then, the Evangelist reminds us that the only ‘sign’ is Jesus raised on the Cross: Jesus who died and rose is the absolutely sufficient sign. Through him we can understand the truth about life and obtain salvation. This is the principal proclamation of the Church, which remains unchanged down the ages. The Christian faith, therefore, is not an ideology but a personal encounter with the Crucified and Risen Christ. From this experience, both individual and communitarian, flows a new way of thinking and acting: an existence marked by love is born, as the

saints testify.⁴

An important part of ‘showing’ Christ to others in our life can be summed up (and let’s not take this as obvious) in the joyful, habitual practice of mortification and penance: voluntarily renouncing comforts and pleasures which, without being bad in themselves, could cool down or hinder our union with God. The temperate use of material goods, without letting oneself be entangled in their coils, holds a fundamental importance for our union with Christ and our apostolate.

Many years ago now, our Founder wrote that ‘people expect from us, God’s children in his Work, the *bonus odor Christi* (the aroma, the fragrance of Christ)⁵, which, supported by our temperance, enkindles them and draws them forward.’⁶ In contrast, if we do not reject the contagion of worldly goods, if we think it is impossible to carry with us the demanding environment of Christ, if we don’t know how to go against the current, we will not be able to help others find the great happiness of friendship with Jesus. A worldly environment, unfortunately, is found in most places. We have to invite the others, first by our own example, to breathe the clean air of God’s nearness. And to attain this, temperance of the heart and the senses is indispensable: *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.*⁷ We need to be convinced that only thus can we love this world of ours passionately.

What a great responsibility Christians have! Let us meditate once more on those words that Saint Josemaría wrote in *The Way*: ‘Many great things depend—don’t forget it—on whether you and I live our lives as God wants.’⁸

And our Chancellor added at the end of his letter: Continue praying for the Holy Father and his intentions. Ask our Lord to make his service to the Church very fruitful: that all Catholics — shepherds and faithful — take his teachings to heart and put them into practice. And unite yourselves to my intentions as well: forgive me for insisting so much, but I really need you, each and every one of you.”⁹

Let me finish these reflections on the Triumph of the Cross. The Church is constantly celebrating Christ, the Risen Christ who had to show his wounds to be recognized by his disciples on Easter Sunday. Saint Josemaría wrote: “If things go well, let us rejoice, blessing God who makes them prosper. And

if they go badly? Let us rejoice, blessing God who allows us to share in the sweetness of his Cross.”¹⁰ And he added in another point of *The Way*: “I will tell you which are man's treasures on earth so that you will appreciate them: hunger, thirst, heat, cold, pain, dishonour, poverty, loneliness, betrayal, slander, prison...”¹¹ Notice that he calls all those dislikeable realities treasures and invites us to appreciate them. Let us pray that here at Strathmore University we receive and give the right preparation for life to call all those things treasures and to appreciate them whenever they cross our path. In this way, life is always beautiful, life is always worth living, as we learn to appreciate its treasures.

Let me remind you of a couple of celebrations which may help you to pray for Opus Dei. The 6th of October is the 5th anniversary of the canonization of Saint Josemaria. And on the 28th of November we will celebrate 25 years since John Paul II established Opus Dei as a personal prelature, in fact as the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. We like celebrations and we ask for prayers.

Thank you very much!

May God bless you all!

¹ Cf. Lk 9:23

² Benedict XVI, Homily at the Basilica of St. Paul outside the walls, June 28, 2007

³ Cf. Jn12:32

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Homily*, March 26, 2006

⁵ 2Cor 2:15

⁶ St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, May-1935/ September 14, 1950, no. 65

⁷ Mt 5:8

⁸ no. 755

⁹ Letter from the Prelate, September 2007 (www.opusdei.or.ke)

¹⁰ *The Way* 658

¹¹ *The Way* 194