

The Last Lesson

- *Baccalaureate Mass*
- *The Most Holy Trinity*
- *June 14, 2014*
- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

Welcome to this Mass on the weekend of your commencement and welcome to this beautiful cathedral together with the Archbishop. Thank you for coming. You are doing a very good thing to be here with your family and friends on this important weekend of your life.

We have the custom at Seattle U. for one professor each year to deliver what is called his or her “Last Lecture”. Sometimes the professor is retiring, sometimes not. Sometimes the students just are curious what the professor will say. I don’t think they are ever hoping that this will be the last time they need to listen to a lecture by the chosen professor! I would like to give what I am calling a “Last Lesson” from your education at Seattle U., a lesson to top off other lessons, the one that sums them all up, the capstone lesson for you. You don’t need to take notes, but I do hope you will take note of what I say and will remember something of it in the summer ahead.

I choose an easy topic: “Who is God?” It is a good topic for this Mass, called the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. “Who is God?” is the last lesson, the biggest lesson, the lesson which is behind, and beneath, and above all the lessons of your education, whatever is your major. “Who is God?” is the major of all of us, of your university education and your life.

So, then, who is God? God is the God of the Mountain, the God of the Manger, and the God of the Morning. One God but threefold.

God of the Mountain

The God of the Mountain, that is the God of Moses, is the God of Mystery. God in a cloud, unseen, unknowable, above, beyond, but behind all that is and the source of all that is. You cannot look on the face of the God of the Mountain, because this is the God of Mystery: the Mystery of our lives, capital “M” Mystery. We become aware of the God of the Mountain when we experience that there is more to our lives than we usually know. In the ecstasy of art or music or literature, in the beauty and the awesomeness of nature, in falling in love and being loved, in becoming aware of a call within us to justice, in the face of a newborn child or the death of a beloved parent, in the unexpected reach of the mind and heart, in the eyes of the poor or elderly—in these experiences we become aware that our lives are based on, surrounded by, and bathed in a Mystery which is beyond us, supports us, embraces us, and surrounds us. In this Mystery we live and move and have our being. We are from this Mystery. We don’t want to solve it, but to live the Mystery more fully, more deeply. Look up at the nearest star, 25 trillion miles away, one of 200 million stars in our one galaxy, our galaxy one of a billion galaxies, and in doing so touch just the hem of the God of the Mountain, the God of the Cloud of Unknowing, the God of Mystery.

God of the Manger

The God of the Mountain, of Mystery, chose not to remain unknown to us, not to be without a face. God chose to be the God of the Manger, to show himself, show his face as the God of mercy, in Jesus of Nazareth born in a manger. God of the Manger is God among us, Emmanuel, revealing in Jesus in deed and teaching and healing and death and resurrection that God is through and through mercy, forgiveness, loving kindness. In Jesus, the God of the Manger, we learn that the first and the last word, the first and middle and last name of God is mercy, is compassion. We could not know this simply on our own about the Mystery in which we live, and move, and have our being. It was made known to us as the good news about God, the gospel of mercy, shown by God among us, Jesus of Nazareth, making known in all he said and did and loved and suffered and gave that the very fiber of God's being, the true face of the God of Mystery is not unknown or unseeable but is mercy.

God of the Morning

The third point of my last lesson—and I hope you've learned by now that Jesuits always speak in threes—is that the God of the Mountain—of Mystery; and the God of the Manger—of mercy; is for us also the God of the Morning, the God of our daily life now, the God of what each day will bring, the God of the personal mission of our lives. If the Mystery of God of the Mountain is too big to grasp, if the mercy of the God of the Manger is too good to be true, the God of the Morning, of our mission, comes close to us, comes home to us, comes to where we get up each day, where we live each day, how we choose to live each day. God is also the Spirit moving within us, weaving the texture of our lives, shaping our souls, calling us to choose, and to act, and to live out of the truth of ourselves animated by the Spirit of God within us. Not just mountain, not just manger, but the home of our heart, the morning of each day. You know the mission of Seattle University: “empowering leaders for a just and humane world”. The God of the Morning, the God of the Spirit, God within, is the God inspiring your mission, your personal mission in life for and with others. What is the mission which God the Spirit is writing within you?

This is what I wanted to say to you as a last lesson of your education at Seattle University, taking on the biggest question, the capstone subject of all capstones, “Who is God?” I hope that on this weekend of your commencement and in some sunny days ahead with more space in them, that you will do three things:

- Stand in awe before the God of the Mountain, the God of Mystery, and be grateful for your life and the love that has given you life;
- Look on the face of the God of the Manger, the God of mercy, God made known in Jesus of Nazareth and let him be your professor, your teacher; and
- Know the God of the Morning, the God of your mission each day, and go forward experiencing that you have a companion on your journey who is none other than God the Spirit within you.

The only exam from this last lesson is your life... and know that God grades on the curve, the curve of mercy!