

When History Comes Home

- Baccalaureate Mass
- June 10, 2017
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Graduates of 2017 of Seattle University, you have the honor of graduating at the culmination of our celebration of the 125th anniversary of your university. All year long we have been celebrating this milestone with banners, parades, Masses, reunions and homecomings, advertisements, and even lighting the Space Needle, the Wheel, the skyscrapers, and Century Link Field in Redhawk Red. All along we have looked forward to your commencement weekend as the culmination and closing of this year of celebration. Thanks, Fr. Ryan, for festooning your cathedral also in Redhawk Red for this occasion, which just happens to be also the color for the Holy Spirit, the Holy Redhawk Spirit.

As you graduate this weekend a whole history—your university’s and your own personal history—pauses, takes stock of itself, gathers itself together, before moving on into the formation of a new history, a new future, your university’s new history, and your own future. Tomorrow at KeyArena it is time for handshakes, hugs, and hoorays together with classmates, families and friends. Today, right now, in this majestic cathedral, uplifted by the glorious sound of the choir, surrounded by your families and professors, and present within the Mystery of the Mass, now is a moment to gather the past into the present, to come home from the past years of your life and your education to now, to your heart, to the distillation of your life in the secret of yourself, and there in your truth to find God.

Our university’s history from 1891 till today comes together in a unique way in this cathedral. Presiding at our Mass is the pastor of the cathedral, Fr. Mike Ryan. He, too, is a graduate of Seattle University in that he received an honorary doctorate from us. So we should call him Dr. Fr. Ryan. More significantly his great uncle, Theodore Ryan, was in the very first graduation class from Seattle College, he became a priest, and later became the famous and formidable Monsignor Theodore Ryan, and he too received an honorary doctorate. When they built this cathedral, they feared the Jesuits at Immaculate Conception Church were too close for comfort, so they pushed them further away to St. Joseph’s Parish on the far side of Capital Hill, and who but Monsignor Ryan became the long-serving pastor of that formerly Jesuit Immaculate Conception Church. As they thought, and perhaps you agree, you just don’t want to be too close to the Jesuits! It is best to admire them from a distance! Well we are back! History has come full circle. A Ryan presides at a Mass for the Jesuit university in the cathedral and does so at the climax of its 125 years of history. From our long history of faith and sacrifice, from the constant commitment to Jesuit education, from a core of the humanities for thinking for oneself and for service of others in justice, from this history is distilled the university you have experienced and grown within and loved. 125 years of history crystallizes in your years at Seattle U., comes home in you and your classmates, pauses in your experience of Seattle U. Here we meet God, in this cathedral and Mass: God having walked the whole way with us, God meeting us here today, God welcoming us home.

In our readings today Moses met God on the mountain, St. Paul met him in the fellowship of the Christian community, and we are invited in the Gospel to meet him in the Son, sent into the world by God to encounter us and to give us eternal life. I invite you for a few moments in this sacred space to let the whole history of your life come home to you, to be distilled in you, to find a place of rest in you. Let your past find peace in your present.

This year I was talking with some of your classmates who were asking me how I pray and how I discern life choices. They seemed fearful and unfamiliar with the essential thing I said about finding God in the sanctuary of myself. So I asked them, “Don’t you too want to be present in silence to the truth of yourself?” A couple of them replied that when they try that, try stopping everything else, try turning off all distractions, to seek silent presence, they do not find a promised peace, but rather anxiety. Their remark has haunted me. I believe their anxiety comes simply from the unfamiliarity, the infrequency, of stopping, of allowing and welcoming silence, of really being present to oneself, undistracted, truthfully. This is important, I believe, because this is the place where we meet God, the home in our heart where God is to be found, not on the mountain, but in the present moment in the silent sanctuary of the self. And I am quick to add that we meet God in others because we respect them as sacred, as temples of God, as uniquely loved by God as we are.

I am asking you in this Mass before the handshakes, hugs, hoorays of tomorrow, simply to come home today to what your history at Seattle U. and before and beyond makes you to be. How does your childhood and your family and your parents’ love and hopes come home in you today? How does your earlier schooling and your Seattle University education and activities and friends of these years find a place of rest in your heart today? How is your service of others, your presence with the poor, your learning from others whose lives are so different from yours, your commitment to justice, how is all this distilled now in your values, your truth? Before passing on can you be present in silence to the truth of yourself now, and can you more frequently go there in the future, finding God encountering you in your real life? Where else really would you expect God to be found?

We should realize that we are in one place on an insignificant planet of a star, which is 25 trillion miles from the closest star, and that there are 200 million of these stars in our one galaxy, and that this galaxy is but one of a billion galaxies. If God is out there, God is unreachable. But if God is within us, has come to dwell within us, then God can be found because God has drawn close to find us. We should also realize that our incredible bodies are made up of about 40 trillion cells, and each of these cells is more complex in its elements and structures than an entire metropolitan city. Yet, we are not complex, we are one, we are simple, we are a person with a unifying soul... and there in that home God dwells, God loves, and God awaits our presence.

In summary, at this Mass in which the history of your university comes home, so also you are invited to come home in your history to your truth as a person, which is far more beautiful and more sacred than any cathedral. Be there today, be there frequently, find God in your real life, and find true peace.