

Seattle University
Baccalaureate Mass
St. James Cathedral
June 14, 1997
Most Reverend Thomas j. Murphy
Archbishop of Seattle

In all of our lives, there are beginnings and endings. Rarely does the same event celebrate both realities. Yet, that is what we do this afternoon. Today we celebrate this Baccalaureate liturgy, where we take time during a hectic graduation weekend to gather in this sacred space of our Cathedral Church. We celebrate the ending of an educational experience that equips us with knowledge and skills, competencies and abilities that enable us to live out our vocation in the years ahead. The ending we celebrate did not happen by accident. It is the result of sacrifice and struggle, long days and sometimes longer nights of study and cramming. Countless people have invested in the lives of the Seattle U graduates of 1997 - parents, families, friends, teachers - and to each of them we give thanks. Without them, we could not celebrate this ending.

Yet, paradoxically, we also celebrate a new beginning, a beginning that challenges us to ask ourselves how do we use the gifts that have been given to us during our years at Seattle University. In many ways, the Word of God proclaimed to us this afternoon responds to this question that should haunt us every moment of our lives.

Frederick Buechner, a splendid Protestant preacher, once said that the "religious person" is a "queer mixture" of three persons: "the poet, the lunatic, the lover." As graduates of Seattle University, hopefully you have caught the spirit of what we call "the Jesuit charism," a charism that asks us to see God's presence in everything and everyone, a charism to see wisdom in the foolishness of the Gospel message, and a charism to take the radical risk to love a good and gracious God.

I ask you to go back with me to centuries ago when Moses was minding his own business, tending a flock of cattle and sheep. He comes to a mountain top which was a sacred place to the people of his time. Suddenly he sees a bush on fire that will not be consumed. He hears a voice and does not know its source. The voice calls out to Moses and Moses responds, "Here I am." The voice tells Moses, "Come no closer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is *holy ground*."

My friends, if you dare to become poets, then you too will hear God's voice in your lives. You will hear the invitation to step forth and approach a good and gracious God. But, before you do, you must remove your sandals. When you do, then you will discover you are standing on holy ground.

Yes, God invites you to walk into the class room and the board room, the court room and the operating room, the science lab and the computer room and to discover that each of these places can become holy ground. But you need to be the poet to make it such. You need to leave behind the concerns that the world tells you are so important - the salary you earn, the position you hold, the fast lane of instant success - and to raise the question of how do you bring God's presence into who you are and what you do. If you take this risk, you not only become the poet, you become a saint

Secondly, the Word of God today invites us to become the lunatic. Some of you might believe you have already achieved this goal. Yet, today, I ask you to recall the words of Paul to the Philippians who tells us that God's grace is present when we suffer imprisonment or try to defend the Gospel. For some to see grace present in the cross is indeed more than lunacy; it is madness. Yet, Paul would challenge us today to be lunatics for Christ by always trying to determine what is best based on God's agenda and not our own, to allow love to overflow more and more in our lives, so that we announce to an anxious world that God is alive and well. For some. this is again absolute lunacy. But, my friends, it is also the grace that can make the difference.

Finally, my friends, let me ask you to become lovers. Can we again go back in time, and put ourselves next to Peter as Jesus asks us three times, "Do you love me?" With Peter, we could protest and tell Jesus, "Of course, I do! Why do you keep asking?" Yet, "Do you love me?" should be the question that should haunt you every day of your lives in the years ahead. Where do you find the answer to this question that makes sense? You will find the answer in the gifts that God has shared with you - the gift of life, the gift of family, the gift of friends, the gift of knowledge, the gift of feeling, thinking, loving. Yes, my friends, on this graduation weekend, Jesus would dare to ask you, "Do you love me?"

I can tell you from my own experience how powerful it is when you meet people who are poets, lunatics and lovers. I meet such people on a regular basis these days as a result of the leukemia with which I live at this moment in time. When I was told I had leukemia six and a half months ago, I was also told I had but a few days to live. Yet, I stand before you this afternoon as a result of God's Providence and the prayers of people.

However, what keeps me alive is the gift that some anonymous poet, lunatic, and lover offers me every couple of weeks. This week, I will once again go to Providence Hospital, only a few blocks from Seattle University. I will go the fourth floor and a nurse will direct me to a room where I wait to receive a gift. It is the gift of a transfusion of blood that comes from an anonymous person. I do not know who this person is. The person could be African American, Native American, Asian, Hispanic or Anglo - man or woman, young or old, tall or short. Yet, this person, whoever he or she is, gives me the gift of life with no strings attached, with no conditions. And I immediately say a prayer for this poet and lunatic who shares the gift of life with me. But most of all, I give thanks for this lover, this generous loving person whose gift enables me to live. And I give thanks.

My friends, may you dare to become poets, lunatics and lovers who dare to share your gifts with others - with no conditions, no strings attached. When you do, then what we celebrate today is not an ending, but a new beginning that can make all the difference. May you have the courage and faith to do so. Congratulations to you, the 1997 graduates of Seattle University.