

Archbishop Lori's Homily: 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time; 125th Anniversary of Notre Dame of Maryland University

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Sept. 8, 2019

A Long and Storied History

It is a special joy to join with you all of you in celebrating the 125th anniversary of Notre Dame of Maryland University. I warmly greet your president, Dr. Mary Lou Yam, Sister Charmaine Krohe, Provincial Leader, the School Sisters of Notre Dame, past president Mary Pat Seurkamp, members of the Board of trustees, alumnae and alumni, and most especially those of you currently enrolled in this wonderfully historic and forward looking university, under the patronage of Our Lady, the Mother of our Savior.

Notre Dame of Maryland has a long and storied history. In the short space of a homily, I can't provide anything more than the CliffsNotes version of that history (if indeed CliffsNotes still exist!) – In doing so, I shall tread on ground already well-covered by Dr. Yam but since this is an educational institution, I'll resort to the old saying that “repetition is the mother of learning” (*repetitio est mater studiorum*). And in dwelling on that history, we find in it God's providential care for his people.

To be clear, we wouldn't be here if it weren't for a group of pioneering women, led by Mother Mary Theresa Gerhardinger, foundress of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. In 1847 they came from Germany to the United States to educate the underserved, especially girls and women from impoverished homes. They quickly established four schools, three of which were in downtown Baltimore. They were so successful in this endeavor that they needed more room and with amazing foresight

in 1871 they secured this beautiful site where today Notre Dame of Maryland University continues its mission. First called the Notre Dame of Maryland Collegiate Institute, the school founded on this site educated elementary and high school girls – and the reputation of the Sisters as top-notch educators continued to spread far and wide.

And then came the next step: In 1895 the SSND's established the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, let us be clear, the first Catholic college for women in the United States to award a four-year baccalaureate degree – pioneering indeed. This bold move garnered favorable publicity at the time and drew students, young women, from all around the country. And they received here an excellent comparable to any college, anywhere. Today we pay tribute to the memory of those who founded the College, Mother Theophilia Bauer, its first President and its first dean, Sr. Mary Meletia Foley. Their vision and spirit still animate this community of faith, learning, and service!

More Recent Developments

Yet, their vision and spirit are not something to be preserved like a museum piece, something that is shielded by a protective cover and dusted off now and again! No, the vision of the SSND's who founded this institution is alive and well, capable of reading the signs of the times, capable of growing and expanding to meet the changing needs of a changing Church and a changing world. And so we celebrate today the modern transformation of the College into a contemporary Catholic university with schools and offerings designed to enable its nearly 3,000 students – undergraduate and graduate – to succeed nobly and authentically in a 21st century environment.

For example, Notre Dame opened doors of opportunities for so many, for example, by Masters' Degree programs for professional women and by programs in business, healthcare, and, of course, pharmacy – its groundbreaking School of Pharmacy opened in 2009. And not long thereafter the College rightly became a University with Schools of Arts and Sciences, Education, Nursing, and Pharmacy – and many other learning opportunities for professional and personal development. There's a lot to celebrate here! Truly we give God thanks and praise!

More Than the Sum of Its Parts

Yet, a lightening-round tour of the school's history doesn't do it justice, not only because there is so much history one has to skip over, but also because such a survey doesn't begin to catch the spirit of the place. To do that, we might by referencing the school's motto: "Veritatem Prosequimur" – that is so say, "We Pursue Truth" – and not only the truth discovered by human ingenuity and creativity but indeed the truth and wisdom of the Gospel – for as we look at the beauty of this campus we are wont to say, "Wisdom Has Built Herself a House!"

The truth and wisdom at the heart of this enterprise are very much on display in the Scripture readings that were proclaimed in today's liturgy and, if you don't mind, I'll lead a CliffsNotes tour of those as well, for they speak of the wisdom of the Gospel that animated the minds and hearts of the religious sisters who founded this University and all those who continue to sustain it today.

It is not the wisdom of the world but God's wisdom that has enabled more than 22,000 alumnae and alumni to go out into the world and make a difference. In the reading from the Book of Wisdom the author reminds us that behind every work of art and literature, behind the words of every language, beneath the amazing discoveries of science and technology, amid the beauty of creation, there lies the creative hand of God, the God who created the world in wisdom and love. It is a wisdom that often eludes us, a wisdom we really cannot grasp on our own, but only when with the help of the Holy Spirit.

And it is the Spirit who opens our hearts to the words of Jesus and to the wisdom of the Gospel that he preached – especially the wisdom of preferring no other love to his divine love and the wisdom of embracing his Cross in whatever form it presents itself in our lives. This was surely the vision of the women who travelled from afar to educate the young and the underserved, in Baltimore and far beyond. They did it because they consecrated their entire lives out of love for Christ and, like Christ, they made many sacrifices and shouldered many hardships to do so. As we see today, they instilled that same wisdom and love in their students, a wisdom and love that results in more than high learning and professional competence. It results in lives of integrity, service, and sacrifice—qualities much needed in our world!

Conclusion

As we celebrate this anniversary, let us enlist the powerful intercession of heavenly patrons, especially Blessed Mary Theresa Gerhardinger, and, of course, Our Blessed Lady, Notre Dame, the Mother of the Savior from whom this beautiful University takes its name. Through their intercession may Notre Dame of Maryland University continue to grow and flourish and may it shape and influence and lives of new generations of alumnae and alumni for many years to come! Through their intercession, may Notre Dame continue to transform the world thru education!

Congratulations! And may God bless you and keep you always in his love!