

College graduates urged to keep texting in check, stay connected to God

WASHINGTON - Today's college graduates are all too familiar with texting and using online social networks, but they were advised to keep these tools in check so they can stay connected to God and others.

"It is important to stay connected to friends, family and associates. It is also important to stay connected to the deeper reality of our existence - our relationship with God," Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl told the graduating class at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Md., May 15.

Recounting how one young man told him that he receives or sends hundreds of text messages a day in order to stay connected, the cardinal offered alternative advice emphasizing the need to be connected to the Gospel message.

"Be true to your identity. Never forget your relationship to God," he said.

He also noted that the graduates "face grave challenges and great opportunities" in bringing Christ's hope to the world and they also have "a wonderful opportunity to renew the face of the earth" and their relationships with God and each other."

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood also spoke about technology dangers during the May 23 commencement at Jesuit-run Boston College.

He urged the graduating class to act with civility particularly in today's climate where the internet is damaging the political discourse, the Boston Herald reported.

"When you can tweet, or blog, or post to Facebook from a device that fits in your pocket, it's easy to forget that your digital words can be far more callous and cutting than your verbal ones," LaHood said adding that "people regularly type things on the Web that they would never say in person."

Other graduation speeches might not have addressed modern technology but still challenged students to do their part in making a difference in today's world.

Capuchin Franciscan Father Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, urged graduates at Franciscan University of Steubenville in Ohio May 14 to stay close to Jesus to obtain true success in life.

He said their mission is to rise above the world's preoccupation with material possessions, physical beauty, intelligence and fame, and strive instead for holiness.

The graduation ceremony also included tributes to Franciscan Father Michael Scanlan, chancellor of Franciscan University for the past 37 years, who is retiring this summer.

Franciscan Father Terence Henry, university president, credited Father Scanlan's work in support of the church, the pro-life movement, evangelization and renewal of Catholic higher education and added, "Our church and culture owe this man a debt we can never repay."

At St. John's University in Queens, N.Y., May 15, graduates were advised to "think big and dream bigger."

"I don't want to put any more added pressure on you but the next 10 years you'll be making the most important decisions of your life that will impact you forever," said the commencement speaker Mike Repole, a St. John's alum and co-founder of Glaceau Vitamin Water.

He advised them to "lean on family, friends and faith in order to help you make these tough decisions."

Some college graduations not only celebrated accomplishments of seniors but of the school.

On May 14 Neumann University in Aston, Pa., marked its 10,000th graduate - Mary McNichol. At the end of the ceremony, every graduate received a T-shirt with the message "I Walk with 10,000" emblazoned on the front.

The school was founded in 1965. When it was first established by the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia it was named Our Lady of Angels College and had just 115 students. In 1980 the name was changed to Neumann College, to honor Philadelphia's St. John Neumann. In recent years it added an evening division, went from all-women to coed and began granting graduate degrees. In 2009, it officially became Neumann University.

One of the university's honorary degree recipients was Bill Giles, chairman of the Philadelphia Phillies who joked with graduates that he is the "father of Phillie Phanatic" (the team's mascot) "and now he's going to have to call me 'doctor.'"

Other Catholic college honorary degree recipients included: Frank Butler, president of Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities, at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn., May 14 and Gen. Peter Pace, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, at Fordham University's Graduate School of Business May 24.

Mount Aloysius College in Cresson, Pa., sponsored by the Mercy Sisters, awarded an honorary degree to its May 7 graduation speaker Jesuit Father William Byron, former president of Loyola University of New Orleans, University of Scranton, Pa., and The Catholic University of America.

But the spotlight of the day was on the student speaker, 80-year-old graduate Charlie Mastervich, who advised his fellow graduates to persevere and to be serious about completing tasks.

Mastervich completed his college degree with a major in humanities after a 51-year hiatus that included sending his three sons to college and working for a local newspaper.

At the graduation ceremony he spoke about the importance of humility, which he said comes easily at his age. He said the best way to practice this virtue is by recognizing that one's accomplishments are only made through the help of others.

Contributing to this story was Mark Zimmermann in Emmitsburg and Lou Baldwin in Philadelphia.