

To my dear fellow Ateneo Law School alumni.

Traditionally, this is the part of the Baccalaureate Mass where I get to gush over how stunningly dapper and good-looking you all are in Ateneo blue togas coupled with your well-groomed hair, smooth complexions, hypnotizing fragrances, your mile-wide smiles and the visible stirrings of your souls so eager to face the next challenge that stands between where you are now and your noble vocation.

But alas, my present vista is that of a multitude of empty wooden pews.

And although I know that beyond what my eyes can presently see, you are there, not any less gorgeous, handsome and euphoric as I currently imagine, this scenario is such a glaring reminder of the times we are in.

You will forever be remembered as the first Ateneo Law School class—hopefully the last and only—that suffered through the final leg of their law school journey in the middle of a pandemic. But you will be enshrined more for having ultimately stared the challenge in the face, endured the task at hand and emerged with your dream of becoming an Ateneo lawyer intact.

You sheltered your dream well from the villainous virus and now you are another step closer to its fulfillment. In fact, looking back, you laboriously protected that Ateneo Lawyer dream against the many trials of scholastic work and the sometimes covetous demands of community life in the Ateneo Law School.

Looking ahead, the bar exams, whenever that is, will soon enough confront you, craving to snatch your dream away. We have absolutely no doubt that you, as products of the Ateneo Law School, have what it takes to prevail but we also acknowledge that the bar can defeat you, if you let it. So, don't let it. Strategize, study hard, prepare yourself mentally, physically, emotionally. Don't let it defeat you. Don't let it take your dream away.

Looking even farther ahead after you do pass the bar and take your oath as lawyers, is that when we can finally say that you have attained your dream? Yes, but only in form. Not in substance.

For to be an Ateneo Lawyer is a constant, lifelong effort. It will call upon you to carry on, as lawyers and as human beings, with a passion for justice, for excellence, kindness, decency, honesty, responsibility in true service and for the greater glory of God. The world will, many times, taunt you to forego these virtues. Don't let real life take your Ateneo lawyer dream away from you.

In the Gospel of Luke, there is an account of the Lord admonishing a type of lawyer. And He says: *“Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”*

But as the Holy Bible is an account of history itself, it is comforting to know that Christ uttered those condemning words at a time when there was as yet no Ateneo de Manila University School of Law.

Work then to become the lawyer who knows that the law is an instrument to serve and not the lawyer who wields the law as a weapon or worse, the lawyer who wields the ignorance of the law as a weapon; who will work for justice not delight at oppression, who will use authority to serve others not to flaunt self-interest, who will excel and not ennoble mediocrity. Work then to become the lawyer who lifts burdens not inflicts them. In fact, be that person even now. Be the Atenean that you are now.

Keep your Ateneo lawyer dream close to your hearts, close to your souls, at the bar exams and at every challenge. Shelter and nourish it as you have done so against the coronavirus. As you have done so all these years. And you will find that it will protect you.

Congratulations Class of 2020. We will miss you.