

Homily, Baccalaureate Mass, 9 June 2013
Ateneo School of Medicine and Public Health
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Just two points for our reflection. First, something on gratitude. Second, something on mission.

Gratitude. Here in the Ateneo, whenever we come to the end of a journey, we celebrate the Eucharist. Not just because it is a tradition. Not just because the Ateneo is Catholic. The word 'eucharist' in the original Greek literally means thanksgiving. So today, we celebrate the end of medical school with a simple sincere 'thank you.'

Thanks to parents and families who have been waiting patiently for the last five years. Thanks to the professors of the ASMPH and the AGSB, who led you through talks and tips and tests, who shared their experience and expertise, who believed in what you had to offer. Thanks to Dr Bengzon, for being inspiration incarnate, for having a way with words that makes them stick to the heart, for articulating the dream of an Ateneo and Ignatian formation. Thanks to classmates and colleagues in the school with whom you journeyed, who have become, I hope, real friends. Gratitude is more than just words of thanks. At heart, it is a whole attitude, a way of seeing life and how life moves forward.

Today's readings are curious. They were not planned for. They are the regular readings for the Mass of this day. Yet if we look closely, we will see that they manifest what the attitude of gratitude is all about. Both the first reading and the gospel tell the stories of widows whose sons have died. In the first reading, the prophet Elijah prays to God to bring the body of her son back to life, and God grants his wish, and the widow of Zarephath rejoices. In the gospel, Jesus encounters a funeral procession on the road. He sees the weeping widow of Nain. His heart goes out to her. And it was then that he commands the son to rise. And he does.

With these readings, the Lord, the giver of life, is reminding you, our so-called doctors of the future, of something very basic. Yes, after five years of schooling, you have become experts of sorts. You can examine and analyze and diagnose, you can prescribe, you can strategize and implement. You can do many things as, how do you say things here, "outstanding clinicians," "dynamic leaders" or "social catalysts," but you can never ever make the breath of life come back to those who have died. The readings are a reminder that in the end, we are still all in the hands of God, and that all that we have is gift. That is at the heart of gratitude.

There was a risk involved when you came into this school. Because in the Ateneo, you are pushed hard, driven to excellence, to organize your thoughts with logic, and express them with clarity, to observe empirical data and read financial statements. You are pressured to submit papers, pass exams, meet requirements. And you did it. Congratulations! But the danger is that the Ateneo might subtly be leading you into thinking that you got to where you are by sheer will power and effort. Today, in gratitude, we affirm once more that what seems to be *our* strategic plans and *our* brilliant minds and *our* inexhaustible energies, are not ours, but God's. And this is really why we have this Mass, this Eucharist, this thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the antidote to Atenean *yabang*. It is an acknowledgment that left on our own, we would not have been able to do it, really. That within the structured program, the combination of events and coincidences of these past five years were also filled with the twists and turns and surprises of a loving God, in gifts we could not even have imagined to ask, in gifts we do not deserve. And so, we say thank you, from the heart.

Now, something on mission.

Today, this God who gifts us with our training in medicine and management, now sends you on mission. Not just passing the boards. That too. But beyond that, the bigger task. Real life. Real pain. Real death. Real sickness. Real problems in public health. Real decisions that will call for real discernment. This mission will not be easy; it is for a lifetime. There will be many distractions, many temptations to pull back. There will be moments of doubt and fear and abandonment. When the challenges do come, the important thing is to keep your eyes on what matters more - two things.

First, keep your eyes on those who come to you for healing. Look to them with love and patience and understanding.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI says that Christian charity has to do with responding to basic needs: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for the sick. He says that those who receive the mission of service must be professional and trained and committed. But he adds that training and commitment are not enough. He says that: "We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern." They need to experience over and over again the richness of who they are as images and likenesses of God, which poverty and pain can sometimes make them forget. They recover their humanity when they are made to feel once more the love of a doctor who cares and gives. (*Deus Caritas Est*, n30)

So you cannot be intellectual automatons when faced with sickness. You must be human beings to fellow human beings. And you must care. Otherwise, all this will

be a waste. There is a memorable line from “It Takes a Man and a Woman.” *Medyo corny, pero may sinasabi: “Minsan sa kagustuhan nating maging magaling, nakakalimutan nating maging mabuti.”* As Ateneans on mission to serve, you have to be both *magaling* and *mabuti*.

Second, as graduates of the ASMPH, you must also have the eyes of the blue eagle that look beyond just single cases. You must keep your eyes on systems, on overall public health strategies, on structures of injustice, on improvements towards equity of access to health care, on being agents of ethical counter culture, on working with teams. *Hindi lang magaling at mabuti, malawak pa ang pananaw sa lipunan, sa bayan. Dahil taglay ang mga mapanuring mata, at ang matalas na paningin ng agilang bughaw.* The world out there is a jungle; and the great temptation is to just do as all else do; and the dream of the Ateneo can very well be sacrificed in the name of survival. *Sayang*, if that happens.

But if it does happen, I hope and pray that you can turn to each other for support, to relive and renew the mission. To translate the friendships that have grown through shared life at ASMPH, from the anatomy labs to the clerkship rounds, working through strama papers and SWOT analyses and marketing figures, fighting sleeplessness and fatigue, and enjoying simple joys every now and then. To translate all this, now, into a life of shared mission and service, in a world that needs, not superheroes, but men and women, doctors, who will always be for others. Who will, as the Lord does in today’s gospel, bring new life and new hope to a wounded world. Amen.