Pastoral Message

Several weeks ago I wrote about the mysterious ways our lives are woven together. When we pursue As a university community, we embark on another chapter in our journey as we begin the 2011-2012 academic year. This year is a time of new beginnings as Saint Leo University is being called to an even deeper level of greatness. With the Opening Mass celebrated on August 15 (the Feast of the Assumption) and the Mass of the Holy Spirit we will celebrate on September 1, I am reminded that our potential for further greatness is rooted in our mission and values. Saint Leo University is a leading Catholic teaching university of international consequence and is called to greatness much like the woman we remember and honor on this Feast of the Assumption.

As a young woman—really a teenage girl—Mary responded to God’s invitation to greatness by simply saying “Yes” and giving herself completely to God’s plan. She had no knowledge or action plan, but she did have a clear objective to trust in God: “Let it be done unto me according to your word.” Her willingness to give her life and her will over to God, not knowing what was happening, opened for her the way to greatness. She becomes a key part of God’s plan of salvation for all humanity, and through her would come the greatest person who would ever live, the very Son of the Most High God. Her “Yes” was rewarded, and this is her crown of greatness, the Assumption.

The rapid growth we are experiencing at Saint Leo University may be seen as a sign of God calling us to even further greatness. With record growth in student enrollments and new buildings on the rise, we are constantly looking to higher ground as we grow and expand. There is yet the possibility of being truly great. What does it mean for us to be truly great? When can we finally say, “We have reached greatness.”

I used to think “If only I could do more for our students, more in preaching, be more present, and try to be everywhere for every student, I could help Saint Leo University rise to further greatness.” I believed I needed to be all things to all people in order for Saint Leo University to rise to greatness.

This summer the Lord spoke to my heart and called me to reflect more deeply on abiding in Him, as the grape vine to the branches. As I reflect on my 25 years of religious life, I look back at the excitement I had when I first said “Yes” to the Lord. I did not know what it really meant or where that yes would take me as a Divine Word Missionary. I came to realize that true greatness is not in all that I do, or what we do as a university. Rather, God is calling us to simply give our lives to Him. Give God our success, give Him our growth, and give God both our blessings and our misfortune. I realized that God even wants the challenges that I face.
When we turn everything over to God and place it in His hands by abiding in Him, God bears fruit in our lives for greatness. When we turn over our plans, goals, objectives, and lives to God, He will not only bless us, but He will produce so much fruit in us that we will see greatness beyond our imagination.

The breakthrough to true greatness is on the horizon. God wants all of us for His glory regardless of whether you are a Catholic Christian, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, or any other faith. Whatever your faith is God wants us to turn our lives over to Him for God’s glory. The decision to let God have everything is not an easy one. It requires daily commitment and patience, but God is always ready and waiting for us.

At Saint Leo University, one of the clear ways that we give over to God and abide in His presence is to give any project to Him and ask for His blessing. Groundbreaking ceremonies, the blessing at the placing of the final beam at a construction project, the blessing and dedication of a monument to honor our men and women who serve our nation, the prayer to begin Community Service Day, and the simple blessing of a classroom at the start of the new year are all steps we take to give our projects over to God. The next step for each of us (students, faculty, and staff members) is to make a conscience decision to ask God to come into our lives and our work and to be present and bless what we do.

As we begin a new academic year and celebrate our faith, let the celebration be a communal effort to give all to God as Mary did. Although we do not know what the future holds for us, we do know who has hold of the future. Mary knew that if she held true to the values she received and the faith that had been entrusted to her, then all that was required was her to say trust Him and say “Yes”. Mary truly emptied herself into the hands of her creator. Let us do the same as we start this new academic year. Let us open this new door to greatness; all that is needed is for us to trust in the One who has begun the good work within us.

Peace and blessings on this year.

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