

opusdei.org

# "Study and prayer should be fused in our heart"

Homily and Address of Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz at the inauguration of the 2019-2020 academic year at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, of which he is Chancellor.

10/10/2019

## **Homily from the Mass:**

The first reading that we have just heard presents us with the great

Jewish feast of Pentecost. During those days, many Jews were journeying towards Jerusalem. Two months had gone by since the crucifixion. This was the first time that Jesus' disciples had celebrated this feast without their Master. The city was filled with foreigners, who came "from every nation under heaven" (*Acts 2:5*), including from Rome. After the narration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Acts of the Apostles relates an incident that is relevant for everyone, including those of us gathered here: all those present there heard the disciples speaking about the "mighty works of God" (*Acts 2:11*).

Today a new academic year is beginning: the thirty-fifth for this pontifical university. We could say that, like the people gathered back then in Jerusalem, we come from every nation under heaven. We could also say that, like the disciples,

we too want to speak about the mighty works of God. Therefore we are celebrating the votive Mass of the Holy Spirit; because as Jesus tells us in the Gospel we have just read, the Paraclete is the one who “will teach you all things” (*Jn 14:26*), so that we, in turn, may pass them on to others.

I recall some words of Saint Paul who, when a prisoner in this city of Rome, wrote to Timothy: “what you have heard from me ... entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (*2 Tim 2:2*). Our Lord is addressing the same words to all of us here at this Eucharistic celebration. Today our Lord is calling us—each and every one of us—to form part of this group of faithful people entrusted with passing on the faith, with a deep grasp of its content, each in our own environment: in seminaries, parishes, religious congregations, and in many ordinary occupations in the world.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, the patron of our faculty of Theology, stressed the apostolic value of those who dedicate themselves to studying and teaching others about the “perfections of God.” Although this effort might seem somewhat distant from pastoral concerns, the reality is that those who “form formers” carry out a very important role in making possible the announcement of the Gospel to many others (cf. *Quodlibet* I, q. 7 a. 2 cor). In reality, many more people are present in our classrooms than might at first sight seem to be the case. The deep study carried out there later becomes nourishment for many souls, who perhaps we will never meet personally.

To carry out this apostolate of announcing the “mighty works of God,” an indispensable condition, as Pope Francis reminded us, is “getting down on our knees before the altar of reflection” (Video message to

theological congress, 1-3 September 2015). This is not simply a question of saying a brief prayer before beginning to study. Rather both study and prayer should be fused in our heart: “Doing theology on your knees is daring to think while praying and pray while thinking” (Ibid.).

When we focus on intellectual pursuits without relating them to love for God and the life of our fellow men and women, we run the risk of our efforts becoming a discourse that, in Saint Paul’s words, “puffs up” and does not “build up” (cf. *I Cor* 8:2). Therefore, when recommending that we strive to acquire a good grasp of “theological doctrine,” Saint Josemaria always stressed the need to combine it with the “piety of children,” which is equally important (cf. *Christ is Passing By*, no. 10). Let us ask our Lord to grant us a contemplative soul, because only thus will we be able to discover the

true depth and beauty of his doctrine.

The study of theology, philosophy, canon law and Church communication cannot be separated from the problems and questions of the daily life of the people around us. On the contrary: our study should be undertaken as a service to the Church. Benedict XVI, when speaking about the theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas, said that he carried out his intellectual work “in an encounter with the true questions of his time” (Audience, 23 June 2010).

Let us never separate ourselves from the people around us, out of inertia or comfort-seeking. The aspirations and concerns of our world today should also enter into our study, research and prayer. We see this in Jesus’ life. He listened to the spontaneous questions of those who sought Him out (cf. *Mt 19:27; Mk*

12:18). He went to the homes of many people (cf. *Lk* 19:5), and shared in their joys (cf. *Jn* 2:2) and in their sorrows (cf. *Lk* 8:42).

So let us ask the Holy Spirit to remind us, as we read in today's Gospel, of everything our Lord said, and to spur us to follow his example.

It is often said that the saints are the true theologians, in virtue of their knowledge of God attained through love. The life and writings of Saint Josemaria are a very rich source for academic reflection. I encourage you to get to know him better during your years of study in this university, which he himself was eager to see become a reality. And you will discover, as in other saints of the Church, a harmony between a life of prayer, deep study and apostolic zeal.

Like the disciples who, filled with the Holy Spirit, proclaimed Christ's

message in every language, we too ask the Paraclete to illumine our hearts in this new year of study to get to know Jesus better. And in this endeavor we cannot fail to go also to our Lady, our Mother. Mary is the one who, filled with the Holy Spirit, best knows her Son.

Amen.

---

***Address of Monsignor Fernando  
Ocáriz, Chancellor of the  
Pontifical University of the Holy  
Cross***

The Statutes of this University establish that “through the research, study and teaching of Ecclesiastical Sciences ... the University seeks to serve the Church in full and faithful union with its Magisterium, thus cooperating with the Roman Pontiff in the concern for all the



Churches.”[1] During these days, when a synod is being held about the Church’s mission, it is fitting to consider that all the University’s efforts are closely linked to the evangelizing mission of the Church, called to go forth not only geographically but also to the depths of each person and the heart of every culture.[2]

Collaborating in this commitment of service to the Church is the bedrock of the teaching activity and all the work carried out by the University’s various offices. The educational purpose of the University is to carry out, through its double mission of research and teaching, an intellectual and formative project in the light of Christian Revelation, to enable people to effectively pass on the faith in today’s cultural and social context.

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross has accepted the indication of the Pope – expressed in the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* – to foster a renewal in ecclesiastical studies, in accord with the Church's needs today. To achieve this goal, some basic criteria are necessary, which the document underlines. In the first place, the invitation to reinforce the dialogue between the different disciplines: between those that are properly ecclesiastical as well as between these and the other disciplines of human knowledge. The document refers to an interdisciplinary effort, understood as a true enlightening and enriching of all human knowledge, through the light that proceeds from Divine Revelation.[3]

This is an important contribution that ecclesiastical schools can offer the academic world, as well as society and culture in general.[4]

Today, in the face of the increasing fragmentation of knowledge, we see how postmodern thinking has renounced “great narratives” or “comprehensive visions.” What is needed is a wise vision that encompasses all disciplines, including the search for solutions to the problems afflicting humanity today. In this context, a decree recently signed by the President of the Italian Republic regarding recognition by the State of the titles issued by institutions of higher education erected or approved by the Holy See, seems to open the way for a more fruitful relationship between Pontifical institutions in Rome and the other Italian universities, in order to offer even more opportunities for lay people who wish to pursue a course of study in the Pontifical schools.[5]

All this can have very positive effects on the relationship between the

university and society, between the world of studies and research and the world of work and production. This is the third mission, besides research and teaching, that is characteristic of every university. The University of the Holy Cross takes up this challenge, putting at the service of the Church's evangelizing mission especially the central message of Opus Dei: the search for the fullness of the Christian life in secular realities and in everyday life. It is an opportunity, therefore, to intensify a fruitful dialogue with contemporary culture. The professors in the different departments have already launched several initiatives of this type. These include the *Center for Legal Studies on the Family*, and the *Center for Markets, Culture and Ethics*, which strives to go deeper into the cultural and moral foundations required for the functioning of markets that respect the dignity of the human

person, in the light of reason and faith. Other projects include the *Higher Institute of Interdisciplinary Education*, whose goal is to increase the humanistic and philosophical and theological culture of young graduates, as well as the *Science, Theology and Ontological Search* initiative, which in collaboration with other Roman universities seeks to foster dialogue between science and faith, through study and research programs. There are also other research groups, such as *Family and Media*, the *Working Group on Relational Ontology Research*, etc.

The University's contribution to society does not depend solely on the teaching staff; it is the result of the harmonious work of all those who make it up. In particular, together with the various aspects of formal education, the educational impact of what is called the "hidden curriculum" is seen as being every

more relevant. That is, the informal communication, apparently invisible and difficult to conceptualize, which belongs to the entire university community. This pedagogical action, composed of words, gestures and attitudes, creates a family environment rich in human encounters and acts as a source of teaching and learning that synergizes with the academic dimension. It is not uncommon for students to stress how, together with the beauty and depth of their intellectual experience, they have become deeply involved in the human and spiritual formation that takes place here through friendship and the unity of apostolic life shared by the academic community. The family tone and the high academic level are part of the precious legacy that we have received from Saint Josemaría and that has been continued by the first two Chancellors of this University,

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo and  
Bishop Javier Echevarría.

We give thanks to God for the work  
done so far and beseech the Holy  
Spirit for help to continue our  
university mission. I entrust to the  
maternal intercession of Mary the  
2019-2020 academic year, which I  
now declare in session.

.....

[1] *Statutes*, 3 &1.

[2] Cf. *Apost. Const. Veritatis  
gaudium*, 27 December 2017, nos. 1-2.

[3] Cf. *Ibid*, no. 4 c).

[4] Cf. *Ibid*, no. 5.

[5] *Decree of the President of the  
Republic*, 27 May 2019, published in  
the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* no. 160, 10 July  
2019.

## Photo gallery from academic act:

---

pdf | document generated  
automatically from [https://opusdei.org/  
en-au/article/study-and-prayer-should-  
be-fused-in-our-heart/](https://opusdei.org/en-au/article/study-and-prayer-should-be-fused-in-our-heart/) (04/16/2025)