

Remarks for Graduation Mass

John Paul II Institute

May 12, 2026

Most cordial greetings to his excellency Bp. Bonnici, Patrick Kelly, Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, our guests from The Catholic University of America, the staff of the John Paul II Shrine, Fr. Stevens, to my colleagues, friends and families and above all to you most dear graduates.

In his March 19, 2026 message commemorating the tenth anniversary of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Leo XIV wrote that, while recognizing its fragilities, “we must learn to evoke the beauty of the vocation to marriage...so that we may reawaken ‘trust in [God’s] grace’ (AL, 36) and the Christian desire for holiness.”¹ The Pope’s urging is a splendid entryway into the mission of the John Paul II Institute.

In fact, St. John Paul II, founded the Institute in 1982 precisely so that, in the Church, there might be a place dedicated to deepening the meaning and mission of person, marriage, and the family as disclosed by Christ’s revelation of God as Triune Love and of the human being created as male and female to participate in his love. Christ’s revelation does not offer yet another religious interpretation of human nature, being, and life that would need to be buttressed, or perhaps corrected, by “more rigorous” modern sciences. Rather, it is in Christ that human nature, being, and life attain their final truth, their authentic goodness, and glorious beauty.

Allow me, then, to take a few minutes to speak first on how we understand the beauty that Christ discloses and in what sense marriage, and the family life it generates, are beautiful. I will then say a word on holiness as it pertains to the nature of theology and our work.

In a time like ours when ugliness, artificiality, and violence are pervasive, it is hard to consider beauty as more than transient looks or subjective emotions. It is thus crucial not to forget that beauty is the splendor of the truth and the good. Beauty is the capacity that the truth and the good have to let themselves be seen and loved by men. It is in this latter sense, as the capacity of the truth and the good to be seen and loved by men, that beauty moves us and delights us.

When we harken back to Christ, who is the “reflection of God’s glory” (Heb 1:3), and consider the beauty of his form as it reaches us through the life of the Church, his Bride, we can identify three characteristics of his beauty that, in various degrees, are also reflected in every experience of beauty we may have.

First, beauty is **gratuitous**, that is, it discloses the gift-character proper to the truth and the good we are given to see. Truth and goodness give themselves *gratis*, without ulterior motives, because being and love are gift. Being gives itself so that finite beings may be, and Love gives

¹ Leo XIV, [Message on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*](#), March 19, 2026.

itself so that it can let us be ourselves in it. In his *Meditation on Givenness*, John Paul II explained that beauty strengthens, enlightens, and encourages us to work and to beget.² Yet, beauty is not “practical,” “effective,” or “productive” in the modern technological sense of the term. Beauty gives light and encourages us to work and beget precisely because it is “for nothing,” utterly gratuitous. Similarly, marriage is beautiful because in it spouses are given *gratis* the love they have for each other and, within it, they themselves receive each other and give themselves to the other as the gift that they are.

Second, beauty **resists being grasped**. When we see something beautiful, we let it be; we do not even consider grasping it. Rather, we simply want it to be. We see it as a whole that radiates a light greater than itself. We participate in beauty through that joyful silence in which we let ourselves be taken. Is not this letting be the very core of Mary’s fiat? When we lose sight of nuptial love’s beauty, we seek to bend married love to our own ideas and transient emotions and thus we become sterile. The beauty of married love invites us to receive it, to let oneself be taken by it, and to let it be.

Third, beauty **leads beyond** itself to the truth and the good that reveal themselves in it. Beauty has a form, and order, and a depth of its own. This is precisely why it illumines and leads. Beauty, as Schelling said, is the finite presentation of the infinite.³ Married, nuptial love is beautiful not because the spouses are beautiful or because they successfully manage to give the form and direction they like to the life they create for themselves. Nuptial love is beautiful because it speaks a true word that is older than the spouses who pronounce it when they exchange vows and as they live their common life. Married love speaks a word that forms them and leads them to their final home—if they listen to it and follow it. To evoke the beauty of marriage, as Pope Leo encouraged us, is to help people realize that married love is a sacramental manifestation of the infinite.

The manifestation of the infinite upon which married love is grounded is Christ’s cruciform love for his bride, the Church. The Cross is Christ loving us as the Father loves him, and it is Christ loving the Father as the Father gratuitously awaits to be loved.

Married love participates in God’s love revealed by Christ; it speaks this divine love in its own way, and it leads to God. For this reason, all the difficulties and sufferings that every married couple face find in Christ’s love the path that can lead them anew to the true good for which married love is given them in the first place. God’s design knows how to enact our true good through our fragile freedoms. Christ’s love is beautiful not only because it is gratuitous, bottomless, and luminous. It is beautiful also because it is omnipotent and everlasting (that is, definitive and ever new). In the light of Christ’s cruciform and risen love, we can see the light that dissipates our darkness and receive the strength to affirm what is true, that is, to welcome it anew within us. It is this omnipotent beauty that reawakens trust in God’s grace.

² John Paul II, “A Meditation on Givenness,” in *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41 (Winter 2014): 871-883.

³ Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heed (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 225.

At the very origin of the foundation of the JP2 Institute lies the desire to educate people into this most beautiful truth of being, of God, of the human being, and of love.⁴ This education, dear graduates, is what we have striven to live and communicate to you.

Let me address now that second point mentioned by Pope Leo, which captures well the yearning present in our hearts—particularly at this bittersweet moment in which we part ways, and you embrace a new phase in your lives—that is, the desire for a holy life. Nothing, in fact, evokes more strongly the desire for holiness than the participation in the beauty proper to true love, to the Love that is God and in which man is called to share.

Our technocratic mentality reduces holiness to the fruit of our moral striving to be coherent. According to this view, education would be the endeavor to acquire the necessary skills so that the intended religious goal may be achieved. Holiness, instead and more simply, is belonging to God; it is a life in God and for God; it is to be in Christ and for Christ, and, being for him, truly be for others. Education, in this view, is the growth in the luminous and fruitful life that God generates in us. Education is the art in which we let truth, goodness, and beauty give form to our existence.

Our technocratic mentality also makes us believe that thinking is a form of making and that thinking is at the service of making. This modern identification of thinking with making, at the origin of modern science, turns theology into what I would call “potential theology.” I call it “potential” to indicate two sides of power: power as capacity and power as possibility. In the first sense, power as a capacity, potential theology consists in a collection of lifeless ideas that need to be applied, turned into “concrete” initiatives to transform life in society or renew the life of the Church. The theologian, in this view, is the agent who has the power to actualize what he thinks has not happened yet (i.e., to make the revealed truth pertinent to contemporary life). In the second sense, power as possibility, life is seen as a set of circumstances that is void of intrinsic meaning and therefore always open to extrinsic manipulation. The theological task in this second sense thus becomes to clothe the ultimately meaningless human existence with arbitrary (religious) interpretations. The theologian here is an agent who is not so much a mediator of purportedly lifeless doctrine but rather a fruitless relativist since what he seeks to do will never happen: a life viewed as essentially meaningless cannot be made intrinsically meaningful. In either case, “potential theology,” resting on its undisputed principle that thinking is a form of making, perpetuates a separation of truth from life, of theology and holiness, that contradicts the very kernel of Christ’s revelation, which is the definitive unity of truth and life, the redeeming presence of the eternal in the midst of history.

Instead, thanks to St. John Paul II and the constellation of authors through whom Christ’s light reaches us, we have come to see that doctrine is not a set of lifeless and limited ideas. Rather, it is the human expression of the truth of God, man, and the world that Christ revealed and into

⁴ In *Familiaris consortio*, JP2 wrote: “God is love (1 Jn 4:8) and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the *capacity* and *responsibility*, of love and communion (GS, 12). Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11).

whose fullness the Spirit brings us. Similarly, they have also taught us that life is not just random and fleeting interactions, but it is existence as always formed by, open to, and in search of the true good. It is not by chance that John Paul II, a saint, claimed that “pastoral concern means seeking the true good of man” – the most complete expression of which is contained in that divine plan for human love which Christ revealed.⁵

The theology that we have endeavored to communicate to you is the theology of the saints. The theology of the saints is born out of the lived unity of Christ’s revelation and human existence that the Church’s tradition and maternal womb make possible. Remaining in the form of Christ and having always the central doctrines of revelation in view (Christology and Trinity), we endeavor to listen obediently and express anew the truth and beauty revealed by Christ so that all of each person (mind, body, spirit) may be brought closer to the God who became flesh, died, and rose for our sake.

Obedient surrender to the truth of Christ and God’s design for man is not a solitary exercise. It is a life of guided communion, an orchestra of sorts, in which we learn from each other and together participate in the humble attempt to disclose anew and more deeply the true beauty to which we have been entrusted.

The education in the truth of the human being, marriage, and the family, prepared by God from all eternity and revealed by Christ, is not confined to a few years of relatively hard work. It began with your families which, as Pope Leo XIV told us at the audience he gave to the worldwide Institute in October 2025—which Bp. Bonnici and I attended—are the first place “where love is learnt,” where the first and fundamental “experiences of trust, gift, and forgiveness are woven together.”⁶

It is our certain hope that the education you received will continue and will bear much fruit through you as you now pursue your different callings seeking to radiate anew the beauty that has made you its own.

Congratulations!

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⁵ John Paul II, *Catechesis on Human Love*, 120:6.

⁶ Leo XIV, [Address to the Professors and Students of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences](#), Oct. 24, 2025.