



Bishop John Bonicci
Homily for Baccalaureate Mass
May 12, 2026
Pontifical John Paul II Institute
for Studies on Marriage and Family
Washington D.C.

Dear graduates, Fr. López, Vice-President and Provost, Dean Crawford, faculty, families and friends. First, allow me the opportunity to express my gratitude to all for inviting me to celebrate the mass on this beautiful occasion. Today we gather not only to celebrate academic achievement, but to honor a mission born in the heart Saint Pope John Paul II who believed with unshakeable conviction that love reveals the meaning of the human person. For him, this was not a poetic sentiment. It was a truth. Through the human person, the meaning of all “flesh,” The whole of creation, is illuminated. This conviction is the inspiration behind the founding of the John Paul II institute. Here, the human person--in all dimensions: theological,

philosophical, anthropological and scientific truth--becomes the privileged place where God's revelation touches history. And nowhere is this more beautifully expressed than in marriage and family, The primordial sanctuary of love where the truth of the person is lived, embodied and handed on for all generations.

Today's readings speak directly to your vocation as graduates. In the acts of the apostles, Paul and Silas, imprisoned and beaten, sing hymns in the night. Their witness opens the heart of the jailer, who asks the most essential question. "What must I do to be saved?" He is told "believe in the Lord Jesus and you and your household will be saved." In the gospel of John, Jesus promises the coming of the advocate, the Holy Spirit, who will inspire and nurture the truth. This is the same spirit His Holiness Pope John Paul II called "the interior teacher." He is the One who forms hearts from within, who enlightens minds, who strengthens the weak, who consoles the suffering, who reveals the truth about God and the human person.

We cannot celebrate this special day without remembering the first president of the institute, Monsignor Carlo Caffara, later cardinal Archbishop of Bologna. In class, he would often remind us--priests, deacons, religious and laity--that the study of theology is only the beginning. He would say, "teaching the truths revealed by God to his people in a pastoral way is a lifelong calling and mission."

Graduates, the degree you received here at the John Paul II institute is not merely the conclusion to years of study. It is not only an academic achievement. It is a commissioning.

Pope John Paul II often spoke about the interior teaching power of the Holy Spirit. A spirit who forms the conscience, purifies the heart, and strengthens the will. In fact, from his childhood onward, Karol Wojtyła, prayed daily for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. His Holiness knew that no human effort, no intellectual achievement, no pastoral strategy can bear fruit without the spirit's fire. Dear friends, if Pope John Paul II--pastor, philosopher, theologian, Pope, saint--prayed daily for these special gifts, how much more must we do the same?

This institute has given you knowledge--rich, profound, demanding knowledge. But knowledge alone is not the goal. The goal is communion. The goal is mission. The goal is service to God's holy people. In the conclusion of his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II declares that Christians "...have the mission of proclaiming with joy and conviction the Good News about the family, for the family absolutely needs to hear ever anew and to understand ever more deeply the authentic words that reveal its identity, its inner resources and the importance of its mission in the City of God and in that of man." [FC, 183]. With the gift of knowledge in hand, I invite us all to embrace this mission. His Holiness Pope Leo XIV could not agree more. In his address to our institute

during the Jubilee last year, he said: “In this sense, your specific mission concerns the search for and common witness to the truth in carrying out this task, theology is called to engage with the various disciplines that study marriage and the family, without being content to simply state the truth about them, but living it in the grace of the Holy Spirit and following the example of Christ, who revealed the father to us through his actions and words.”

Take what you have learned and happily share it with others: in parishes, in classrooms, in counseling rooms and family homes, in public discourse and quiet conversations, in moments of clarity and times of suffering. The world is starving for truth--not abstract truth but truth lived in love. Truth that celebrates life. Truth that honors marriage and family. Truth that reveals the dignity of every human person. Pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Pray for wisdom, understanding, council, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. Pray that the interior teacher may shape you into instruments of God's grace for world longing for clarity mercy and hope.

Allow me to end with the memory experienced during my time of study at the institute in Rome. It took place a long time ago. At the conclusion of his final class of the semester, Monsignor Caffara offered us a simple yet profound piece of pastoral advice. He said: “as you continue the mission that God is calling you to live, humbly embrace the loving guidance of the Holy Spirit. And when you look

to help persons, never lay the weight of the cross on the shoulders of someone already carrying it.” Confusion, false teaching, and cultural noise can make the burdens of life very heavy. The remedy, the antidote, he said, is always the same. It is “the truth--the true teaching of the church, instituted and nourished by the love of Christ.”

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in a world of uncertainty, confusion, hatred and despair, each one of us is called to be messengers of truth, clarity, love and joy. Graduates, congratulations! May the Holy Spirit, the interior teacher, guide your steps. May God bless you abundantly in the mission that now truly begins.