

23-9 Graduation Ceremony

Congratulations on your graduation. I would also like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the parents of our graduating students and everyone concerned. Reaching this milestone, I am sure that the families of our students and everyone who has continued to support them, as well as our students themselves, are feeling deeply moved in their individual ways. We, faculty and staff members, feel the same way. The ceremony today is an opportunity for you to recall these past few years during which we experienced drastic change on and outside of campus, to think about what your student life has generated and where it will take you, and to share such thoughts.

You are a member of the Sophia family. Sophia University is not just an institution which is part of the school system, but your community and home – a place that you can turn to. For all of us at the university, today is not only the day that we say goodbye and send you out to the world, but also the day that we welcome you into our family.

Now, society is in the nascent days of a new era. The social transformation that we are facing today, including technological innovation, complex international relations, and emerging values, outlines a world that is not found along the lines of human society as we know it today. Our society is at a crossroads. I use the word “crossroads” because human society surely has different options. Some compare the emergence of innovative digital technologies today to the impact of the introduction of the steam engine during the industrial revolution. Back then, when technological innovations drove social transformations, one after another, human society had different choices to make. As a result of our decisions, we overly pursued convenience, high efficiency, and mass production and overlooked that we had sacrificed the global environment. Because it was we who pursued those things, we also cannot avoid the results of our decisions.

This applies to individuals too. It can be said that you are standing at the starting point of a new path, which each of you chose. Your lives will be composed of various multi-phased and multilayered stages. The stages that you reached as you went to junior high school, high school, university, and graduate school, were presented to you within a certain framework, but from now on, each stage in your life will be colored in accordance with the choices you make independently. And these colors will continue through your lives. The choices to be made are unpredictable in terms of their scale, importance, number, or when such opportunities will arrive. At each moment, the degree of freedom that you have in your choices will be a decisive factor. What you have learned or researched at university and graduate school will be powerful drivers for expanding the amount of freedom you have in your choices. The various choices you make in life cannot be compared with each other. Your paths will be formed by many different choices indeed, and the excitement of it is that each path will be a unique one.

Fr. Firmansyah just introduced a passage from the Gospel of Luke. It preaches the importance of listening and opening our hearts, instead of being obsessed with ourselves. This presents us with the attitude we should show toward people who need support and the vulnerable. The multiple choices

that you will face will not be easy. Rather, as you courageously approach each hurdle, the difficulty of each challenge will inspire you to succeed. However, regardless of the circumstances that you are faced with, please have listening ears, open eyes, and a heart that reaches out to the vulnerable. True leaders are people who implement this mindset even when they are challenged with difficulties.

I believe that the significance of “choices,” which I talked to you about today in my congratulatory speech will become increasingly important in this society. The globalization and digitalization of society will bring us all on the world stage. Numberless choices made by individuals, organizations, and society draw the future design of global society, our home. The images of society and of our individual lives are closely linked and do not always yield success. One must not abandon the vulnerable in the shadows of one’s success. In the face of the deteriorating global environment, we must not prioritize short-term convenience or transient interests. I believe that the choices made by individuals, organizations, and society every day should be responsible decisions. I hope that you will pursue fulfilling lives with this sense of responsibility. For all of you who have acquired academic expertise, a broad world-class knowledge of culture, communication skills that enable you to reach consensus with others, and deep humanity based on Sophia’s educational philosophy, “For Others, With Others,” I am convinced that pursuing “responsible choices” will add color to your lives.

Congratulations on your graduation.

September 20, 2023
Yoshiaki Terumichi
President, Sophia University