

## Chancellor's Address for AY2023 Graduation Ceremony: The power of knowledge and discernment

Congratulations to all graduates on your graduation. I would also like to extend my sincere congratulations to your parents and all concerned. The milestone of receiving your degree also means that you are embarking on a new stage of your life. I have been looking forward to this opportunity to congratulate and applaud you all. I am sure that this milestone has a special meaning, especially for those of you whose student lives were changed drastically during the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to express my sincere respect to all of you who overcame these difficulties and successfully completed your degrees.

What did you acquire, along with your degree, through your hardships? Knowledge? Knowledge is indeed power. However, there are people in the world who seem to have a wealth of knowledge but are unable to apply it to their lives. Have you ever wondered why?

Knowledge can only become knowledge when you put it into action. True power lies in the application of knowledge. It is important to take what you have learned and put it into concrete action to create positive impact and change in your life. When you implement what you have learned, you will see the effects unfold before your eyes. Ask yourself how you can put your knowledge into action. Your life will be creative.

Therefore, please remember that knowledge alone is not enough. It is the actions that follow that give us true power and bring about meaningful change in our lives. Take responsibility for your own personal growth and begin to put into practice what you have learned. It will empower you to build a better world.

However, living within the rules of a competitive society, we are also challenged by harsh realities. Equality in opportunity is all that is offered. Human dignity continues to be violated. People are still suffering from violence and disasters, and so on. Nevertheless, you must learn to keep learning and turn your knowledge into power to serve others and the world.

In English, we have a word, "discernment." This is one of the key words of the Society of Jesus, the Order that founded Sophia University. Discernment is also an important power in life for those of you who have studied at Sophia University. Discernment is also "the capacity for high judgment" and "the quality of being able to grasp and understand the ambiguous". The reason why discernment is indispensable is that we live in a world full of different challenges and opportunities and overflowing with choices. We must choose together what is best for ourselves and for others. In a deeper sense, discernment is the ability to grasp and understand what our purpose in life is.

Pope Francis speaks of discernment in this way: "Every day, at home, on the street, at work, on holiday, we have the possibility of discerning good. And it is important to know how to find what counts: to train ourselves to recognize the precious gems of life and to distinguish them from junk." Recognizing what is truly valuable in life and learning how to seek and find it, is indeed distinguishing the gems from junk. This is what we call discernment.

There is an inspiring parable from the Bible about the Kingdom of Heaven. It says, "The kingdom

of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field (Matthew 13:44).” When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. There is another parable that goes, "the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:45, 46)."

Pope Francis said the merchant knows how to discern the valuable pearl from the rest and then he buys it. Pope Francis said, “Realizing its immense value, he sells everything, he sacrifices all his goods just to have it. This too is an invitation for us. But what is this pearl for which one can renounce everything?” The pearl in the parable in the Bible is our relationship with God and the values taught by Jesus. Do you have a pearl worth investing everything in? Have you searched for it? Please search for it. We are small existences, and it is important that we seek, find, and make our own the precious pearl of lives. It will determine how we measure our choices. My expectations for you who have studied at Sophia are that you have learned how to seek and find the precious things in life, including what is precious in others, and that you will exercise that power “For Others, With Others”.

This discussion of discernment may sound slightly abstract. Yet, having made a life decision to enter Sophia University in the dawn of the COVID-19 pandemic, the social chaos experienced then should still be fresh in your minds. Just when the world was struggling to minimize the confusion, Ukraine and Gaza were hit by historic warfare. I used to believe that globalization was underpinned by the concept of people in the international community coexisting in harmony, but that illusion has been shattered to pieces. We have witnessed that human society is still too vulnerable to guarantee even human security. Furthermore, while we were still struck by the horrors of war, we were hit by the Noto Peninsula Earthquake. We were once again reminded of the fact that while humanity has built its prosperity on Earth, which is the only choice available to us, the same humans remain exposed to violent attacks on a scale of different magnitude.

I hope that you will always consider what is important in this reality, choose what is more important, make every effort to learn, and exercise discernment in order not only to make your own lives better but to become leaders in creating a better world.

I would like to conclude my congratulatory address by praying for God's blessings on each of you as you embark on this new stage of your lives and for a prosperous future for all of you.

Again, congratulations!

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