

HOLY FAMILY UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT MASTERS DEGREE RECIPIENTS

Thank you Sister Francesca, graduating class of 2004, trustees, administration, alumni, faculty, family and friends. I am deeply honored and humbled to have been chosen as your commencement speaker and as the recipient of an honorary degree from Holy Family University.

A Masters Degree, Congratulations – you could have stopped at your Bachelor's. This designation means that you have achieved a higher level of skill and knowledge. You are bright stars, achievers. Without doubt, you are doers! But don't forget, the more you achieve, the more you are expected to give. With a Masters Degree, comes greater responsibility -- a need for personal vision, a need for leadership.

Today, I humbly share with you that in my life journey; it is family, faith, courage and love that have allowed me to grow, both personally and professionally. The greatest of these being love.

I define love, as having the ability to see Christ in everyone we meet. To accept them fully, and unconditionally, appreciating and valuing each

human being no matter whom they are or what their state in life is. Mother Teresa said, “Love begins at home – right there. And we must love until it hurts.”

There is no better example of love, faith, courage and family than the story of how the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth came to America. In the 1880’s, a young woman, Frances Siedliska, Blessed Mary of Jesus the Good Shepherd, Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, was asked to go to America and manage a children’s home and school in Chicago for poor Polish children.

At the time, there were only 20 sisters in the entire order, and the Vicar of Rome wanted 10 of them to go to America. Unsure of what to do, she prayed. All she could think of was “How is it possible? We are so few.” Most of the sisters are so very young and haven’t finished their formation. How am I going to do this? They will be so far away. How can I communicate with them? Remember, my friends, there were no planes, computers or blackberries. There were no phones, let alone cell phones with pictures of sisters, so you could send information back to Poland. And, there she was in a church wondering how, how, how? This task seemed so

difficult, so complex, so filled with impossibilities. What should she do? She prayed. She sat quietly listening for God to speak to her heart.

She looked at the image of the Holy Family. In fact, it was the feast of the Holy Family that day. She saw in that image the Child Jesus so defenseless and dependent on the goodness and mercy of the world. And, then it started. She could see her Nazareth taking roots in the spirit of the Holy Family, a spirit of love and of freedom of the children of God. Leaving the Basilica, she knew what she would do. The Sisters of the Holy Family would go to America and plant the seeds of love and faith.

Francis Siedliska was one of us; a normal person with a desire to serve God and others, and to make a difference. Can you imagine what it meant for her and each of these women – to leave their families, their country, everything they had known, armed only with their love and faith -- and cross the ocean knowing full well that some ships never made it? You want to talk about taking risks. It doesn't get much bigger than that.

And look where her journey has brought us to today-- Nazareth Hospital, Nazareth Academy, St Mary's Villa, and of course Holy Family

University, and your graduation today. All because one woman had enormous faith and loved until it hurt.

Do you think that Frances Siedliska could have ever imagined the impact that she would have on the world and on each of you today? Frances Siedliska laid the foundation, but she knew it was up to others to make sure the vision would grow.

Sister Francesca Onley and her fellow sisters have nurtured this vision extraordinarily well over the years. That vision is now being passed on to you. And, for a very good reason. You are graduating from Holy Family University with the skills and tradition of faith, courage and love. How are you going to go out into the world and spread God's love to those you serve, teach and heal?

I have learned that in order to love you must listen. That means listening intently. Being fully in the moment with each human being you encounter. I wish I could tell you I learned this from a book. I didn't. I learned it through experience. For 30 years, I have been a nurse and leader in many hospitals in Philadelphia. Over and over again I see the gratefulness

on the faces of the people I serve when they feel I have listened to them. It goes far beyond feeling heard; it makes them feel loved, valued and appreciated. This love frees them to become all that they can be. It is incredibly powerful. I want to share with you an experience when I felt loved and listened to.

In 2001, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, after surviving a bout with melanoma in 1996 when I was told that I had 18 months to live. Hearing that I had breast cancer was shocking. After my mastectomy, I had a post-op oncology visit. My physician asked me, how I was doing?” I had my game face on. I told her I was feeling great. But, inside I was full of fear. Fear of recurrence; was I doing everything I could to beat this cancer? How could I handle this . . . cancer, being a mom, wife and CEO– how, how, how?

My physician, Lynn Schuchter, stopped me and took my hand and she said. “Pat, I think you’re doing a really great job and I truly believe your going to be fine.” She saw through my bravado. She saw exactly how I felt. She showed compassion and love. She was willing to be with me in my

moment of vulnerability and reassure me. I could not have asked for more. This act of kindness and love took less than one minute to accomplish.

Every day, we have opportunities, both large and small, to effect others. It is up to you what you make of these opportunities. Whether you are educating, counseling, or providing care, you have the opportunity to make a difference and influence the lives of the people you serve.

I wouldn't be standing here today if it weren't for a woman who took a risk with me. I was rejected from 9 nursing schools because I did so poorly on my standardized test. I finally interviewed with a woman from Hahnemann Hospital School of Nursing. I don't remember her name, but I said to her, "All I want to be is a nurse! All I want to do is help people!" And, I pleaded with her because I felt so passionately about being a nurse. To my amazement, I got accepted into the program. Somehow this woman believed in me. She took a risk.

There are several lessons to be learned from this - take risks, believe in people, and "don't give up." Be like Sister Francesca . . . if you want something, go after it and don't stop until you get it.

Throughout all my successes, challenges and failures in life, I have been surrounded by family and friends; particularly, my husband Tony who gives me the faith, love and courage to carry on. Treasure your family and friends, as they are gifts from God.

My wish for each of you is that you have friends and family who love you unconditionally and can give you the strength to know that no matter what happens in life you will always be loved.

So let me leave you with a quote from Norman B. Rice, a professor, who said to a graduating audience similar to you: “So today, I’m asking you to join me and dare to believe that one person can make a difference. Dare to dream. Dare to fail. Dare to make a few mistakes along with way. And most of all, dare to reach out your hand into the darkness to pull another hand into the light. Because when you do, you’ll find . . . that it’s your own hand.” God bless you.

Thank You, God

Dear God,

Thank you for today.

Please help me to enjoy it and live it well.

Thank you for my life just as it is and has been.

Thank you for all good things you have given me and done for me.

Thank you for helping me through the bad,

And, please continue to help me and mine.

Please bless my home and keep it safe.

Love, Mary H. Burns

My thanks to all of you for today. God bless you!

