

Commencement Address by Bernadette Bach, 2015 MTS Graduate

Good Afternoon, Abbot Joel, EIM and MTS Board Members, Distinguished Faculty, Family and Friends.

It is an honor for me to have been asked to be the class speaker this year.

As we are all aware every journey begins with a first step. My first step began a long time ago when I decided to finish my first degree at St. Norbert College in DePere, Wisconsin. I chose that college because it was where my sister Gloria was planning on going because she was a Packer fan. I was not a football fan but the college sounded great. It was there that I became a Eucharistic Minister under the campus pastor, Father Joel Garner back in 1977. I later served on the pastoral council under the next campus pastor Father Gene. I graduated in 1979 in what would be the new gym but it still had dirt floors – do you remember that? We have all come a long way since then, right?

When I graduated in 1995 with my third degree from Regis University my mother told me to not let it go to my head. I think she meant to not commit the sin of pride. But if you look at the four of us graduating today, you can see we are not young chicks, so for us to have accomplished this at this point in our lives is something to be proud of. I believe each of us has been called to bring our knowledge and our gifts to our corners of the world where we live and to spread the Word of God in what we do. I can't help thinking of the little boy who was featured on the news last week, who was now an orphan because he had lost both parents but he wanted to spread joy and make people happy so he had his aunt buy some little toys and he started handing them out to people to bring some joy to their lives. If we think about the saying from Nehemiah, the joy of the Lord is our strength, then we can do the same as that little boy even without the toys.

When I started the MTS program with the Ethics class in 2011, I was ready to just drop the whole idea of getting another degree! Philosophy and I are not great friends, though Frank Yates tried to make it understandable. I am glad I persevered even though the last few months of redoing, and redoing, and redoing the thesis were a test of my faith! Good thing I had Deacon Keith Davis to encourage me along.

Along the way of taking classes, I learned more about my faith and did more theological reflection than I ever realized was possible. I questioned my spirituality with Ken and Sister Geneal, I enhanced my knowledge of sacraments with Dr. Dolly Sokol, I enhanced my knowledge of and relationship with Jesus with Doctors Frank Yates and Howard Ebert. Father Andrew made me question the liturgy. Jennifer Murphy-Dye and Dr. Wallace Ford made me come to understand koinonia and Ecclesia and diakonia and who knew that systematic theology could cover so much ground! Frank Yates and Howard Ebert helped us to cover that ground! Dr. Judith Todd had us delve deeply into the Bible like we had never before done.

Then I was the only Colloquium student at the time, with Dr. Kathy Dolan but I was told by several people that I was lucky to have her. I was told that by people who did not have her for Colloquium but wished they had.

And now we have come to that time of gratitude. Thank you to all of you who helped all of us to persevere. Thank you to the teachers who stretched our minds and to our fellow students who listened to our presentations and helped us to learn to discuss and to question and to wonder and to share. Thank you also to our friends and family.

My personal thanks to now Abbot Joel and to Father Gene, who started me on the path so long ago. Also, posthumous thanks to Fathers Dick VerBust and Robert Brooks who were instrumental in getting this Master of Theological Studies degree program in Albuquerque. I had both of them as teachers back in DePere all those years ago.

I think I speak for all of us graduates that we are grateful to God for the blessings in our lives and you are all part of that, so blessings to you.

I think if each of us carries the joy of the Lord with us to the corners of our world, we can continue making the world a better place. If instead of guns we bring the presence of Jesus with us, the world will be richer and brighter and more full of joy.

Thank you.