

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
75th ANNIVERSARY OF MARYGROVE COLLEGE
SEPTEMBER 11, 2002

Readings: Romans 8:14-27; Luke 4:16-22

Sister Virginia Pfau and Dr. Glenda Price, and my dear friends of Marygrove College:

I join you this day in giving thanks to God for the 75 years Marygrove College has been a beacon of light and hope here in northwest Detroit, educating over four generations of women and men in the ways of faith and culture. Even as we celebrate this day, however, we also join our minds and hearts with our brothers and sisters all around the nation, and indeed around the globe, as we commemorate the tragedy of September 11, 2001. That event of terrorism stands as an enduring and vivid reminder of the very injustices this institution was created to overcome. Through the decades, Marygrove College has sought to foster greater respect for people of every race and ethnic background, working for unity and peace through dialogue rather than words or actions of violence. Now more than ever, Marygrove College is a vital and necessary enterprise for it is truly a place where education is not simply imparted but where community keeps the faith alive and strong right here in the heart of urban Detroit.

On this anniversary, first and foremost, we acknowledge the great contribution made by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan. We thank Sister Virginia Pfau, the current Superior, and all the sisters past and present who have given their lifeblood for the work of this college. We remember the courageous and unswerving vision of Mother Domitilla and those who had leadership positions in the IHM congregation in the 1920s; these bold and brave women saw the need for a woman's college here in what was still farmland. In very uncertain economic times, they tackled a \$4 million project, placing their hope and confidence in the Holy Spirit, knowing that God's work would indeed succeed. And so it has!

When Marygrove College opened its doors 75 years ago this month, the initial 278 students represented just the beginning of what would become a great and very diverse tradition here at Marygrove. Over the past seven and a half decades, Marygrove College has grown in size and significance, not only in Metro Detroit but also throughout our nation, having been in the post-war years the third largest woman's college in the country.

One of the special blessings of the mission of Marygrove College over the years has been its sensitivity to culture – initially the formation of women in terms of culture and social grace through the preparation of teachers and leaders for the civic community. With the passing of years, the student body has greatly

diversified, and for several decades now, has included men. A plurality of cultures are serviced here in this sacred place, and so it truly is a blending of all that is best and all that we could hope for in terms of a “post-9/11” world. We rejoice in that diversity which is well represented among us here today.

As we know, ultimately, cultural diversity is not something that we can easily see or quantify. The culture of which I speak is the battle between a “culture of life” and a “culture of death” here in America, and indeed throughout the world today. Now more than ever, we need Catholic colleges which form students to challenge and transform values and opinions not in conformity with the Gospel.

As our Holy Father has reminded us many times in his eloquent addresses around the globe, modern culture is marked by a pluralism of attitudes and experiences and we must certainly respect that diversity. But at the same time, pluralism never exists for its own sake; it is directed to the fullness of truth – that is, to Jesus Christ. Therefore, as Christians, committed to the Good News of Jesus Christ, following the message of the Council Fathers of Vatican II, Marygrove College and all Catholic institutions of higher learning must seek to purify culture by recognizing all that is authentically human and in harmony with the deepest truth about the human person.

Our Holy Father spoke to this point when he addressed representatives of Catholic higher education at Xavier University, New Orleans, fifteen years ago this

very month: *“The more one seeks to unravel the mystery of the human person, the more one becomes open to the mystery of Transcendence. The more deeply one penetrates the Divine Mystery, the more one discovers the true greatness and dignity of human beings.”*

The work of a Catholic college is not simply the transmission of data or skills, but the formation of habits of virtue, the development of religious and moral values in and among students and faculty alike. So it is, that we speak of an educational community where Christ Jesus is encountered in worship and joint service as well as through the study of the arts and sciences. From such study and shared experiences, a Catholic college can become a source of energy for renewing attitudes and structures near and far, calling to consciousness not only our rights but also our responsibilities for the needs of all our brothers and sisters near and far in global solidarity.

Even as we begin this Third Millennium of Christianity and continue the third century of our nation’s existence, we are consoled by remembering the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Just as the people of Nazareth heard the Lord Jesus proclaim the Gospel He was putting into action, we, too, are challenged to hear and live His message during the years of formation here at Marygrove College and in the world of the professions and business and civic arenas where you will later serve. Every day of our lives we must truly believe the

simple but powerful sentence of the homily of Jesus in Nazareth: “*Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing!*”

Even as we remember the gentle and gracious movement of the Holy Spirit among staff and administration and students over the decades, we also recognize our call to pray for a fresh outpouring of that same Holy Spirit in our own life and times. Seventy-five years ago, Marygrove College was founded in what was then farmland for a mission in forming young women in ways of faith and culture. The neighborhood has changed dramatically and the world is completely different, but the mission of connecting faith and culture remains as challenging as ever. As St. Paul reminds us in today’s first reading from Romans 8, all of creation is growing and in labor pains, as we wait with hopeful expectation for our true and ultimate liberation.

In the meanwhile, it is our privilege and duty to work together for the transformation of our society, advancing the Kingdom of Christ, a Kingdom of truth, love, justice, and peace. Marygrove College has been and will continue to be a very vital partner with many other religious, political, civic, and business leaders in the work of building a new Detroit and renewed and transformed society, a culture of life that will be our lasting response to the tragedy of 9/11, a legacy of enduring hope for all.

May God continue to bless the work of Marygrove College and all those who have been a part of its journey in the past, at this moment, and in all the events and challenges that lie before us in the years to come. God bless you all. Amen.

Alleluia.