

**AMU Baccalaureate Mass – Graduating Class of 2025**  
Ave Maria Catholic Church. May 9, 2025. Fr. David M Vidal

On behalf of our Bishop Frank Dewane, I want to congratulate the graduates of the class of 2025 on this great accomplishment! Bishop Dewane asked me to share his love and prayers for you. Today, Bishop Dewane is taking part in the Episcopal Ordination of the first priest of the Diocese of Venice to be ordained Bishop, now Bishop Gregg Caggianelli, who will serve as auxiliary bishop for the Military Service in the USA.

First, let me recognize the presence of those who have been a fundamental part of your accomplishment: Mr. Monaghan, the chancellor and founder of Ave Maria University and Town, President Middendorf, Members of the Board of Trustees, Faculty Members, and Families and Friends. Because of their sacrificial love, generosity, and dedication, your class is the largest class yet in the history of the University. But it is not just numbers. Many of you have been committing to daily prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, participation in daily Holy Masses and Marian devotions, and have been part of the University's spiritual program: Mary's Marines. This is a University with a Catholic heart, and you experienced the blessings of being part of that heart.

I want to recognize the presence of Fr. Joseph Lugalambi and all my brother priests who serve at the University and assist Ave Maria Parish by celebrating the Sacrifice of the Mass many times during the day and offering hours of confessions and spiritual guidance, in addition to their academic obligations. I am particularly grateful for their dedication and sacrifices!

Today, we offer the prayers of the Mass for our new Pope, Leo XIV. For the last few days, we have experienced the strange feeling of being without a Pope, but now we rejoice because the Holy Father is with us again! The Vicar of Christ is with us, and we are thankful!

Dear graduates, I want to leave you three thoughts.

My first thought: **Your life is eternal!**

Sometimes, we only see ourselves in pictures. This is a beautiful picture: you, your family and friends, and the entire University coming to the Church to give thanks to God for the blessings of your years of studies. Tomorrow's celebration will be another great picture: being recognized for your accomplishments by receiving an academic degree.

There will be multiple pictures in your lives. There will be pictures of joy, enthusiasm, hope, and love. There will also be pictures of anxieties, sadness, suffering, and even

awkwardness. Perhaps, you will be tempted to throw those bad pictures away. However, I challenge you to see your lives with a complete vision. Think about the worst picture in the history of humanity: the image of Adam and Eve after the original sin that brought all the evils of the world. Remember that from that awkwardness, God gave humanity the most beautiful image of the Nativity of the Lord that brought joy to the world, and the image of the cross of Jesus that we proudly wear on our foreheads every Ash Wednesday. God can change our bad moments into glorious moments if we humble ourselves and let Him work in us.

Prepare yourselves to face every moment of your lives within the context of eternity. The book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for everything: *“A time to tear down, and a time to build. A time to weep, and a time to laugh . . . A time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces. (And the text concludes) God has made everything appropriate to its time, but has put the timeless into [our] hearts,”* (Eccl 3: 2-11).

Live the moment, but never forget you are worth more than a moment! Rejoice in the moments of joy, have hope in the moments of suffering, humble yourselves in the moments of defeat, and discover behind all these moments your timeless lives! God created you for eternal life. Do not settle for less!

My second thought: **Seek Christ, your salvation!**

We are in a race! A race implies movement, actions, decisions, one step after another. A race also implies urgency, the need for running, and a desire to win. Now, all these things make sense only if you know the goal and the prize of your race. And the goal and the prize of our race is Jesus Christ.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews encourages us “to persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus” (Heb 12: 1-2). He is our eternal salvation. He is our eternal happiness. He is what our hearts desire.

Unfortunately, sometimes we forget which race we are in, and we start running for other goals and prizes. However, our salvation will never be in our bank accounts, in the influence of the powerful of the world, or in the progress of this world. Yes, we should have great desires and shoot for the Moon and even for Mars! But we should never forget that our lives are meaningless if, at the end of our earthly journey, we do not find Jesus.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus! Find him in the Holy Eucharist, in every Mass when the consecrated host is elevated for our adoration. Look at him, not just with your physical eyes, but with the eyes of your spirit, mind, and heart. Then, say a prayer using the words of the *Song of Songs*: *“Draw me, we shall run after you!”* (Song of Songs 1:4).

My final thought: **Remember your *Alma Mater*!**

In a race, you should not only know where you are going, but you must also remember where you are coming from. Remember the place of your spiritual and intellectual formation. Remember that you were formed in the University of Mary, our Blessed Mother!

With Mary, you have learned to ponder in your hearts Jesus Christ! In other words, you have learned to ponder in your hearts “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, any excellence and anything worthy of praise! (Phil 4:8). Remember your *Alma Mater* and never abandon the School of Mary!

Be messengers of Mary’s message: “*Fiat!*” Let it be done! Mary’s message means readiness to accomplish God’s plan for you, which is nothing but to be the early saints of the third millennium, and readiness to spread the kingdom of Christ, because no one is saved alone! If you allow Christ to draw you, many will run after Him.

Dear members of the graduating class of 2025, enjoy this moment knowing that you were born for eternity. Continue to run your race, keeping your eyes fixed on Jesus. Do not forget your *Alma Mater*, and be ready to offer your yes.