



MESSAGE

CONFERMENT OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF LAWS, *HONORIS CAUSA*

at the

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by

Chief Justice Alexander G. Gesmundo

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Ramos, and Assistant College Secretary, **Atty. Ana Victoria Hernandez**; college deans and faculty members of the College of Arts and Sciences, College of International Relations, College of International Tourism and Hospitality Management, and the Graduate School, and the Expanded Tertiary Education and Equivalency Program; parents and families; friends and loved ones; and of course, our dear graduates—good afternoon.

Several years ago, I entered the halls of LPU, full of awe and idealism. From the province where I finished high school, I was fortunate to be granted resident scholarship for an Economics degree in the College of Arts and Sciences. After graduation, I worked- first, as a researcher in a business paper, then as a marketing officer for an embassy in Makati. At that time, I thought that someday, I would pursue further studies in economics. But fate had other plans for me, and as my mother suggested, I enrolled in law school, finding one near my place of work. Thus continued the long and arduous journey that led me to where I am today, here, at this podium, speaking before you as a proud and grateful alumnus of the Lyceum of the Philippines University.

There is no doubt that what prepared me for that journey was the academic training and education I received from LPU. LPU honed me to be the best I can. In pushing me to my limits so I can maintain my scholarship, I developed the discipline and perseverance necessary for the endeavors I would later undertake. I learned to strive for excellence and reject mediocrity. Indeed, it was during my studies in LPU where my character was formed, and my values honed along with a deep sense of patriotism. *Pro Deo et Patria*. For God and country.

So allow me to express my eternal gratitude to LPU, and for the degree of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa* conferred upon me today, to the Board of Trustees, as well as to the LPU administration and faculty. While, modesty aside, I had been conferred such degree by other universities, nothing would compare in joy and honor to receiving one from my alma mater, our alma mater, which has not only given me an education, but also molded to who I am today. Sa inyong lahat, ang aking buong-pusong pasasalamat—kasabay ng aking pangako na pagsisikapan kong maging karapat-dapat sa napakalaking karangalang ito.

Still, I take this honor as a reflection not of my own personal achievements, but of LPU's commitment to nurture graduates who are ready to lead and serve in their respective fields.

As I try to look back on my days in Lyceum, I am reminded of the life and work of LPU's founder, Dr. Jose P. Laurel. He served in all branches of government, and while he may have been more known as a statesman, leading the country during the dark days of occupation, he was first and foremost an educator and it was in LPU that he realized his dream, and it was through education that he would continue to instill the values which are just as relevant today as ever, values upon which our alma mater is founded.

The enlightened nationalism, as Dr. Laurel envisions it, is loyalty to our country and love for our people. Truly, how much our country can move forward if we put the interest of our country above our own, if our people are united, if we feel empathy and compassion with our countrymen in their struggles.

One wonders, however, whether this concept would still be relevant in a world of global citizenship and advanced technology. Perhaps our millennials and gen-z would ask, "in this information age, should we not just think of ourselves as part of one a global society?"

But nationalism is not contrary to global citizenship. By immersing ourselves in the world and humanity, by acknowledging our shared values and responsibilities with other citizens of the world, it remains all the more important to hold on to our national identity and keep our love of our country. We need to maintain our individuality to provide us with our bearings, for in our loneliness and isolation, we go back to our roots, and in our moments of desperation, we try to gain strength from the lessons of our past.

While the world has become smaller and borders have become virtually non-existent, nationalism still remains a virtue as ever. As we travel to other places for work, and eventually stay, and as we learn other languages, by necessity of work, our love for our country and our citizens will give meaning and purpose to our lives and to our experiences.

Like our national hero Jose Rizal, Dr. Laurel placed his hopes in our youth and their education. I cannot agree any less on the significance of education as a driver of social change. “Indeed, education is the foundation of society and a prerequisite for social progress. Quality education results to a critical and competent citizenry, but education that inculcates patriotism is what will propel us to molding a benevolent force of social progress towards meaningful reforms.”

Today, we are aware of the influence of social media and through it, the proliferation of fake news and disinformation, and the “verbal abuse and harsh public criticisms” elicited by exposing one’s opinions and thoughts online. Now more than ever, we have a duty to educate ourselves, to be discerning and critical, to know the truth. And it is our duty to defend the truth when it is attacked, to challenge lies with facts, to make sure that truth is never distorted.

And with all the information now available to us, we must recognize that still we cannot do things alone, that we cannot rely solely on our own strength and abilities, no matter how great we think they are. For this, we must cultivate the value of **HUMILITY**. This, among others, asks us to recognize that even after some personal achievements, we still have much to learn. As long as you maintain this mindset of humility, learning and growth will come easily.

My dear graduates, in your first few years after graduating, bear in mind that your purpose is not just to build your resume, but to develop your strength of character. Do the right thing in matters big or small; do the right thing even when no one is looking; do the right thing even when it is difficult. This is not always an easy thing to do, but just keep doing it; without knowing, it will become second nature to you. And in that way, you will prosper wherever you may be.

Finally, wherever you go, whatever field you pursue, cultivate a strong sense of **SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**. Always bear in mind the words of our alma mater: *Veritas et Fortitudo*—strength not just of mind but of character—*Pro Deo at Patria*: For God and Country. As Lyceans, we have a higher calling: to work not just for our own comfort and success, but to use the skills and lessons we have learned for the greater glory of God and in service of our nation and its people.

In looking for ways to do this, wherever you may be, you need not even look that far. In the aftermath of the pandemic, in the middle of the multiple economic, social, and environmental crises around the world, you can already see all around you hunger, poverty, oppression, and injustice. As I always remind my fellow Lyceans: to see these things and not try to help is reprehensible. To accept the world as it is and not try to change it for the better is just cowardly.

We are one and part of humanity. We share in the pain of our fellow human beings, in the same way we rejoice in their triumph. So, mindful of what we owe each other, champion a cause; fight for something; work for the benefit of others. There is always something we can do to make this place a better world—to leave it even if just a little better, and fairer, and more just than when we found it.

This sense of social responsibility is something I would like to underscore particularly for the law graduates with us today. As you prepare for life in the legal profession, I would like to emphasize the very first lesson that is taught in law school: that lawyering is service. It is a service to others in need of justice. It is a service to others in search of truth. While lawyering will certainly not leave you penniless, money is not its end. Its ultimate goal has always been, and will always be, public service and the administration of justice.

Indeed, through his life and works, Dr. Laurel imparted lessons which even today would provide us with guidance and direction no matter which field we have chosen. His teachings are relevant today more than ever and his legacy is not lost even with the younger generations.

My dear graduates, I have said this before, you have been as fortunate as I to receive an LPU education. And this I can say, as someone who has been in this university as both student and teacher: there is nothing you cannot achieve. Like me, you have the right and the capability to aspire to be leaders in your chosen fields. Like me, you will find, after leaving LPU, that bigger challenges, higher stakes, and harder paths await—but with the values of instilled in us by our alma mater- gratitude and humility; honesty and trustworthiness; patience and perseverance; respect and kindness; and a deep and abiding sense of social

responsibility, guided by the compass of doing all things *Pro Deo et Patria*, you will never lose your way.

Again, my profuse thanks to LPU, and to the Graduating Class of 2023: it is truly my honor to count you as batchmates through this honorary degree. Congratulations and Godspeed!