

The Last Homily

- June 6, 2021
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

Campus Ministry offered me the opportunity to preside and preach at this last student Sunday Mass of the year, knowing that it would also be my last Mass with students after 24 years as president of Seattle U. You've heard of the tradition here at S.U. to invite one faculty person to give what is called "The Last Lecture", with the idea that if you had just one last lecture to give in your life, what would you say that is most important to you and what you would want to be remembered for. So think of this as my "Last Homily".

I start with a story. In my first year in 1997 the students devised an initiative called "Shadow a President; Shadow a Student". We each were to shadow the other for three days. My student was a Filipina. I brought her into a Cabinet meeting, into a session on the budget, a conversation on how to raise money, a planning session with the Board of Trustees, a talk to a business group. At the end of the very first day she said to me: "Fr. Steve, I have two questions: 'How many decisions do you have to make each day?!' and 'How long do you have to do this?!'" I guess the answer was tens of thousands of decisions over 24 years. When I shadowed her, she took me to a Math class where I was totally lost and embarrassed about not understanding a thing. To cap things off she took me to a Salsa Dancing practice in the laundry room in the basement of Bellarmine. I decided I'd better stick with being president for a very long time and making lots of decisions.

My last homily after all these years is for you our students here in this chapel this afternoon. We may not be many but God loves each of you as much as God loves millions at one time, and God loves each of them as much as God loves you. It seems God is not good at Math either since one equals a million and a million equals one in God's eyes. Speaking to you in my Last Homily I can speak to all of our students over these years, some 50,000 of them. What I want to say to you in my last chance is about who you are in your mind, your heart, and your soul. That's so "Jesuit": things in threes: mind, heart, soul.

Mind

Every cell in the human body is more complex in its structure and content than a metropolitan city. We have about thirty trillion cells in our bodies. Of all that composes us the most complex is the human brain. In fact, the human brain is the most complex thing in the entire universe—as far as we know. With the help of the brain God gave us extraordinarily wonderful, rich, intricate, powerful minds, the closest thing to God's mind. What I want to say to you is that the most beautiful thing in my experience is the human mind, unfathomable, inexhaustible in its capacity to think, to know, to seek, to wonder, to imagine, to ponder, to investigate, to explore, to thrill to science, philosophy, poetry, art, history, the world and its peoples, the universe, and our own destiny and place within all that is. What an incredible blessing we have been given by God in the human mind, and what a call and an invitation to use it fully. I hope your experience at Seattle U. has been an opening into the wonders of the mind; how it can be informed and disciplined, treasured, and trained, employed for the richness of our lives and the service of others, and the praise of God. A motto for Seattle U. has been "Connecting the mind to what

matters.” I hope you have found and developed your own intellectual passion and are applying it to what matters to you and that you will always hold as precious your incredible mind and will develop it.

Heart

Could there be anything deeper, more wonderfully closer to defining who you are than your mind? Yes, there is and we call it your heart. Your heart is your capacity to love, to care, to feel for, to have empathy and sympathy, to have affection, to be moved to action by what moves you. We would be incredible robots, but still only robots, if we had minds but did not have a heart, a capacity to love. We would be cold calculators if we did not have warm hearts to reach out to others in care for them. Heart is more intimate than mind, more explicitly and distinguishingly human. By heart we reach out in love to all that is: others, our world, animals, our universe, God. When we say our motto as a university is “Connecting the mind to what matters”, what matters does so because of how our hearts link us to the other in that we care about the other and so can apply our minds to it. Most simply, heart is our endowment to love. A famous saying attributed to the Jesuit leader, Fr. Pedro Arrupe, perhaps says it best:

Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in a love
in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination will affect everything.
It will decide what will get you out of bed in the
morning,
what you will do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.

Soul

Finally, could there be anything deeper and more wonderful and more defining of who we are as humans than mind and heart? Yes, there is and it is called soul. Soul is the unique sanctuary at the center of who we are, created by God as the place in us where God abides and where we meet God. God wishes not only that we can think with our minds and love with our hearts, but God wishes that God be able to dwell within us, in a place of blessing, a place of encounter, a place of prayer and praise, a home in the human for the God who makes us and wishes to dwell with us. This Chapel of St. Ignatius is a beautiful sanctuary in its curving shapes, its play of soft lighting, its very texture. We’ll miss it. It’s a holy place, an embracing place, a place explicitly dedicated as a gift to you our students. Maybe you will carry all your lives the image of this chapel as what “sanctuary” means to you, the holy place on campus, the soul of the university. There is a more beautiful sanctuary here, in fact many of them and each different; they are the

sanctuaries in you, where you go to meet God and where God invites and awaits you, your holy sanctuary, your soul. It is more beautifully shaped, lighted, and textured than this chapel because its architect is God. We familiarize ourselves with our souls through prayer. Through prayer, quiet personal prayer, we learn there to be present to God who is present within us. Ultimately, our soul is the truth of ourselves, a truth that is unique for each one of us, the unique shape of who we are as created by God. To pray is to be present to the truth of oneself in silence, the silence of our sanctuary, the silence of our souls. Perhaps for us, for each in our own way, through poetry, or nature, or music, or art we pry open the doors of our souls so we can enter them and be welcomed by God abiding there and awaiting us.

These, my students, are the things I most want to tell you about in this my Last Homily—mind, heart and soul. This is “the whole person” that we are dedicated to as a university. These three are what I have tried best to serve, and these three are the gift and the blessing I hope for you in your lives. Please know my prayers for you. I will shadow you.