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Archbishop challenges graduates to imitate Christ in face of unemployment

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Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila accepts his honorary Doctorate of Humanities from San Beda College and presents it to his parents, Manuel and Mila. (N.J Viehland)

MANILA, Philippines -- Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila challenged new graduates Friday to imitate Christ's example of loving relationships, humility and service to God as they face unemployment and other post-college struggles.

"This is the hour we've been waiting for," Tagle told 446 graduates and their parents and guests at San Beda College in Mendiola, Manila. "This is the hour when true persons formed after the very person of God will glorify God."

Before handing out students' diplomas, San Beda [1] officials, led by Rector-President Fr. Aloysius Maria Maranan, conferred on Tagle the honorary degree of Doctor of Humanities.

"Tagle deserves this honor from the school because he embodies San Beda College's ideals of fides (faith), virtus (virtue) and scientia (knowledge)," wrote San Beda College's Board of Trustees in its petition to the government Commission on Higher Education.

Maranan, the college's dean, Napoleon Juanillo Jr., and other officials helped Tagle put on the San Beda academic attire before handing him his certificate, which he presented to his parents on stage. After thanking San Beda for the doctorate, he shared the honor with the Church and specified the Archdiocese of Manila.

Struggling with transition

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In his commencement address, Tagle repeatedly referred to the graduates as "my batchmates" and reminded them, "After today, you will be subjected to a lot of expectations."

He said the students are leaving the comfortable world of school to enter the "world of the unemployed." Almost half of the Philippines' 2.9 million unemployed are between 15 and 24 years old, according to the Department of Labor and Employment [2].

For many graduates, there will be no more cash allowances from parents, and hours spent in malls would be focused now on job hunting, he predicted.

Acknowledging that "every transition is traumatic," he told graduates their most valuable contribution to society is their "own person," and urged them to give of themselves, not just what they have. He said not to be proud just because they earned a degree or because they are graduates of a distinguished college.

"True persons give God the glory," Tagle said.

The archbishop also reminded graduates to listen to "humble people" who may not have had much schooling.

"Learn from them, as you have learned from professors in our alma mater," he said. "Learn from the little ones, they are good teachers."

Diana Krizelle Manio, who graduated with a Bachelor of Science in business administration, felt motivated and inspired by Tagle's talk.

"He reminded us that after graduation, there are challenges for us bigger than just our own jobs," she said.

Manio told *NCR* she hoped to be hired in the business or finance section of a multinational manufacturing company like the Ohio-based Procter and Gamble [3] or Swiss-based Nestle [4] to expand her horizons, but was not sure she would get such a job despite graduating with honors.

Manio said Tagle's message about service inspired her to also take up advocacy for a good cause, whether she gets her dream job or not.

"I was impressed because I didn't expect that a bishop would talk like a normal person, and even called us his batchmates. It's not my usual experience with priests and bishops," she said. "Here was a person of position, already archbishop, and still he seemed so reachable."

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