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Prepared text by Most Rev. Leo T. Maher for University of San Diego Commencement Ceremonies

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Prepared text by Most Rev. Leo T. Maher
for University of San Diego
Commencement Ceremonies
Civic Theatre
May 29, 1970

Your graduation calls for an expression of our most cordial congratulations and felicitations. I join your parents, relatives and friends in paying tribute to the completion of a great success story of your graduate college or university life.

This graduation ceremony focuses our minds on the importance of a God-centered education for the student and for the nation.. Religion is essential to America for it is the background of our democratic ideals. It was necessary not only to bring democracy into being but also to sustain it. We cannot sever ourselves wholly from God from whom our freedoms are derived. A democracy which forgets God, is a democracy that will perish. It is of prime importance to preserve our religion, a religion that is the sum of our obligations to a personal and transcendent God if we are to hold fast to those principles on to our fundamental values we cherish.

These ideals are expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights and from the rock foundation of the Declaration of Independence. They imply a personal responsibility on the part of man to his Maker and they give expression to the principles that flow from the very nature and dignity of man. They are true for all time because they are embedded in human nature as God created it. From them we know that man does not live on bread alone.

We of the present day are the inheritors of this splendid spiritual heritage. It is for us to cherish ideals and values that are not sordidly material, but which are true, noble, beautiful and spiritual. In no other way can we hand down to the coming generation the spiritual heritage which should be man's most valued possession.

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To preserve this splendid heritage, we must dedicate ourselves to two ideals: The ideal of true democracy and the ideal of personal integrity.

First of all, we must dedicate ourselves to the democratic ideal as understood and interpreted by the framers of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. This ideal is admirably set forth in the Declaration of Independence in the eloquent words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." And these rights, the right of life, to freedom and the pursuit of happiness are inborn. They inhere in our human nature, in human personality endowed with an immortal soul and destined to an eternal life of intimate union with God in heaven. And these rights are "inalienable". They cannot be suspended or curtailed by human power, nor can they be validly surrendered by the individual that possesses them. God alone can bestow them and reserves to Himself the right to take them away.

While we esteem the ideal of democracy, we must likewise cherish another ideal, that of personal integrity. In democracy we need individuals who are intelligent and informed, men who realize that they have rights and likewise duties. But we especially need men and women of sound, moral, religious character, men of the type which Washington declared "the pillar of a nation's well-being". We need citizens who are just, who are generous and self-sacrificing, who are obedient to authority. In a word, we need men and women whose lives are dominated by principles that are right and true. It is utterly futile for us to think that we can have a nation more vigorous than the personal integrity of those that comprise it.

It is a great pleasure to present these graduates to America and declare that they are prepared to be the pillars of a nation's well-being.