

Graduating Speech: Melissa Carnall - 5-14-15

Representative of the Graduates

Catholic Theological Union's 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Commencement

Dear graduating classmates--

We have received a profound gift. And we have shared this gift with one another.

This gift is one of the main reasons I came to CTU. This gift is our unity in our diversity. We are diverse in every sense of the word. Women. Men. Religious. Lay.

Ordained. Young. Not so young. Habited. Plain clothes. International and people from all over this country. Mostly Catholic, yet also Protestant, Jewish, Muslim,

and unaffiliated. We don't just make a good brochure (though we certainly do that), we live a diverse reality, a microcosm of our global Church and our

globalized world. Not without its challenges, with this gift, we intentionally learn

how to be church and be a human family across all that divides us. In fact, some of you are getting degrees in that, I'm looking at you, intercultural studies!

When I came to CTU, I conceived of my degree as a degree in learning to love

better, that is, to share our God, who is Love, better. I leave here today, with that goal well-attended to, the work of a lifetime for sure, but well-prepared in the work

of living Love, of accompanying our neighbor, of encountering the Other, better. I

also leave here with the funniest degree title ever. Master of divinity. Really? Who

can master the Divine? It does make me sound pretty qualified though for all you who may be hiring out there. Just wanted to point that out 😊 But all kidding aside, we have embarked on the road of learning to love better and we go on from here with more resources at our disposal and more room in our hearts to continue the follow the call of our God, who is Love.

The gift of our diverse communion has taught us the value of understanding culture and context so as to be able to live and love well together. On this journey, we know that voices can compete, polarize, and silence one another. Our own church, sometimes displays this rigid divide. But now that we know better, and have experienced another way, we are called to do better (thank you Maya Angelou). We shuffle our feet to erase lines in the sand and instead, we remember that we belong to each other. We follow Jesus to the margins of our society and we reflect our Trinitarian God when we create spaces for the voices in our diverse church, which we have attempted to practice here at CTU.

I know that you all have done this for me. My dear classmates, the supportive staff, my encouraging professors, my family and friends, and many others who have accompanied me, you have helped me find my voice, helped me grow into the person, the minister that God is calling me to be. So this last part I want to share

with you, is a Spoken Word poem, which I've written at the request of some of you, my friends, and it is entitled, "Our Graduation Gift."

My first day of class at CTU, my 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday  
In small groups in Professor Vanessa White's class  
We share stories of Christmas morning in our families of origin  
My eyes welled as I experienced the gift  
Of our beautiful diversity  
Like the gift of the sun shining or a baby's first words  
It is a gift we unwrap by experiencing the moment  
Leocadie shared about her three hour Mass of celebration in the Congo  
And Juan shared of the traditional food for that morning in El Salvador  
And I shared our suburban Florida traditions of cinnamon rolls and taking turns  
unwrapping  
My world got bigger and my God broke out of her box,  
the first of many times at CTU  
As we unwrapped our gift of studying here  
  
And we have unwrapped our gift by living the surprises *together*  
And we say thank you  
For the gift of together  
Because it hasn't always felt like gift  
Like my first day of class this last semester  
Again with Professor Vanessa White  
The tears did not only well, but flowed freely

At the loss of a dear colleague and friend,  
Our sweet Valerie  
Who welcomed each new student here  
Of course it hasn't always *felt* like gift  
But whatever our hard days have been  
We walked this road together  
A diverse communion  
And that is the gift which we have been given

A gift we unwrapped by dancing our hearts out  
At fiesta primavera and taste of CTU  
And by dancing the dance of  
Family life, work life, and community life  
Our outside supporters the ones who should take a bow  
As we dance on from here  
Moved by the marvelous exchange of the dance of Love itself

A gift we unwrapped in every transition from whole class lectures to small group  
discussions  
In common space and breakout rooms  
When we reveled in wisdom shared  
A lawyer-sister from Indonesia  
A single mom from the suburbs  
A religious-brother and refugee from Vietnam  
We shared our stories and delved deeper into The Gospel Story.

A gift we unwrapped in every word of encouragement shared  
Before the big days of comps and during the never-ending days of thesis writing.  
A gift unwrapped in the professor who gave us a chance to rewrite our paper  
Because we are here for more than just grades but  
Because “the people of God deserve our best”

Holding out our hands, we receive our graduation gift with profound gratitude  
For all that has been  
In these past few months or eight years  
Holding out our hands, we say ‘yes’ to all that will be  
Because as St. Luke and Sr. Laurie tell us—  
to whom much is given  
Much is expected.

And we can say yes to the unknown  
Because we have known God through one another

We can say yes to whatever changes lie ahead  
Because we know that we do not face them alone

We can say yes to a church and to other beloved traditions  
Because we follow in Jacob’s footsteps and wrestle with a God we love

We can say yes and live the questions of tomorrow  
Because the answer is to live into the living mystery of God

We can say yes to being found out as ministers of God's love  
Because we have found out that the love of God is always more and more and  
more

We can say yes to Hope  
Because we have confronted the despair  
Of our divided church and hurting world  
And we discovered that death and division do not have the final say

We have unwrapped our graduation gift  
A present we cherish  
By being present to one another  
A gift that calls us forth to be the gift of love.

Amen.