

November 2, 2017

Our Common Home: Sustaining a green and “clean” Campus

Welcome Note by the President, Fr. Pierre Najem

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning.

In his unique Novel, “The Idiot”, Dostoevsky talks about a beautiful, but suffering and abused young girl, Natassya. The Prince Myshkin, regarded by everybody as “idiot” because he looks at the world with empathy and innocence felt compassion for her, he wanted to save her, because she was hurt, abused and suffering.

Another young man of the merchant class, Rogozhin, violent and unstable, passionate and obsessed about Natassya, wanted desperately to have her, to possess her, but he will kill once he does so.

Myshkin knew that his beloved is hurt, that her beauty expects redemption. *“Ah, should be kindness in her, everything would be saved”*.

Hyppolyte Terentieff, a pragmatic, materialist and nihilist man, asked Myshkin a question: *“Is it true that you once said: “it is beauty that will save the world? What kind of beauty will save the World”*, it was difficult for him to understand that care, respect and love can heal our wounded world.

In Nathassya I see our earth represented: beautiful yet humiliated, precious yet suffering, generous yet abused. An earth seeking redemption.

Our world is torn between opposing “forces”, of contrasting cultures and relationships. Think of a force where Masters and Slaves still exist, where the modern culture of profit and easy gain dominates and abuses many. From an opposite side, think of the magnetic force that brings lovers together, in a pure form of good will, lovers who can see the divine image reflected in all creatures.

It is a culture of gain and abuse versus a culture of love and caring,

A culture of possession versus a culture of Sharing,

A culture of dominion versus a culture of serving and protecting Beauty and Goodness.

In a Catholic Institution of Higher Education like NDU, we believe that “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it*” (Gen 2:15). But it is also us, the human beings who have decided not to take care anymore, and to become “*Like God, knowing Good and Evil*”. The composite verb “to know” in the Old Testament Hebrew Yada’ literally means “to lay hand on, to possess”: that was the first sin, when man refused God’s commandment to take care of his creatures, and decided to dominate; it is at that exact moment that our world started losing its Divine Beauty.

In the name of everyone at NDU, we accept to renew our commitment towards God and the mission of taking care of our garden. We believe that any *“creature is not a property, which we can rule over at will, or even less, is the property of only a few. Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude”* (Pope Francis).

Let us think together of the Lord’s words from the Book of Numbers: *“You shall not defile the Land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I the Lord, live in the midst of my people”*. Do we want to answer our Lord with a YES? Yes, Lord! We shall not defile the Land, we shall turn it into a greener place, we shall not dominate, we shall redeem its beauty and safeguard its divine dignity.

For all these reasons, we are committed to our garden, to our “common home”. We have pledged it before God, answering Pope Francis *Laudato Si*. We have pledged it by being members of the Global Compact and support the UN Global Goals for sustainable development. We have also pledged as a Catholic University to share knowledge, to spread the word and to have an impact, a positive impact on our country. For all these right reasons, I am welcoming all of you today here at NDU, welcome home Dr. Victoria Charles, we are grateful to have you among us as a keynote speaker.

Allow me to thank all those who worked hard to prepare for this conference: Dr. Edward Alam and the team of Benedict XVI endowed Chair of Religious, Cultural and Philosophical studies. Thank you for all the precious efforts you have been doing for years.

I would like to thank also the co-chairs and the members of the Environmental Sustainable Development Taskforce. Today we solemnly start our journey toward a zero waste Campus, through a 3 year Sustainability action plan that will be discussed with Dr. Charles today for her input. Let us work all together, for a better Campus, and for a better Lebanon.

Thank you again for being here today, may God bless us all.