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*Opening Mass for the Inauguration
of the 2026–2027 Academic Year*

Homily by Rev. Fr. Mark A. Lewis, S.J.
Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University

Basilica of Sant'Andrea della Valle
Rome – Tuesday, October 6, 2026

Dear Brothers,
Dear Sisters,

Francesco Petrarca in his *De Vita solitaria*, weighs the value of a life of solitude and study/research against the life of civic engagement. While he preferred the former, he nevertheless acknowledges that both play an important role in human flourishing.

As we celebrate the beginning of the academic year, calling on the Holy Spirit to strengthen our commitment to a certain solitude and discipline in our studies, we do so in the presence of many members of the diplomatic corps, benefactors from the world of commerce and social action, and of course prelates of the Church, all of whom have chosen the latter alternative of virtuous engagement with the world. In our own lives, as students and teachers we are perhaps called to balance both Petrarcan values—research into the *scientia Dei*, contemplation of the mysteries of God, and the practice of the virtues in our society, whether the academic community, the Church, or the community of nations.

It might appear from today's first reading that Paul might share Petrarch's preference for the contemplation of the mysteries of Christ in solitude—but we know that Paul was engaged in establishing and forming communities of faith and never feared descending into the oftentimes chaotic struggles of the early Church. Perhaps today's reading clarifies itself at the end, neither Paul nor we have the perfect answer. We will always pursue that complete knowledge of Christ that we might only possess when we are called upward to Him at the end of time.

Are we willing to be faithful to that pursuit, that *sequela Christi* wherever it might lead us? By our baptism, all of us are called to follow the way of the Lord, through our own embracing of the Cross but always toward the resurrection and union with Him. But do we allow other things that distract us from our higher calling? Even more when we consider the more particular calling of our vocation to a way of service to the Church, or even more the specific mission that we receive whether it be study or active engagement in the world. Today's Gospel provides a list of excuses, but even the strongest ones do not exempt us from the call to follow Christ, the means for doing so might change with our circumstances, but the demand is that we remain faithful no matter what comes to distract us.

Today's responsorial psalm, perhaps my favorite, reminds us of the wisdom and blessedness of staying close to the Lord, through prayer, through our devotion to our neighbor, through a life of Christian virtue. Like a tree that grows near living water, we who remain close to the Lord, the source of all that we are, will allow us to flourish all year round, all of our lives, no matter our specific mission, and like that tree, we will produce that God provides in due season. As we begin our academic year let us stay close to the source of all blessings in our life, let us stay close to the Lord, putting aside those things that prevent us from taking up the cross and following him. In this way we will produce abundant fruit for the Lord.

