We are delighted to welcome you, the Class of 2010, to DeSales University. You represent a “new generation” in Center Valley, literally, for you are the first entering class after our first 40 years of existence.

The “newness” of your being here can mean different things. On the one hand, you may sense a certain excitement ... you now have a chance to do what you’ve never done before, as you begin to set sail on your own. On the other hand, you may also feel some trepidation ... none of this is familiar to you and that can cause anxiety. Let me assure each of you – and all of you in the bleachers who see the shirts that the students are wearing – that ship pictured on the back is not the Titanic! It is, though, a ship of dreams, headed to the new and broader horizon which is the context for beginning this exploration of who you are and who you will become.

That’s the big picture. For now, though, there are more immediate concerns that you have to face. Two things, in particular, should get your attention today, two things that you must deal with right away, two things that can make or break your university experience. Neither of them has to do with your academic courses [and for that I apologize to my faculty colleagues seated here] . No, the two fundamental issues you now face are ... housing and food! Fortunately, the biblical readings you just heard shed light on both of these for you today.

Most of you have just moved into new housing. This may well be the first time you’ll be living on your own. While comfortable, the room you’ll inhabit is probably smaller than you’re used to, you probably can’t fit all your stuff in it, there aren’t enough outlets for all your gadgets, and, oddest of all, there’s some strange person you’ve never seen before also staying in the same room. Welcome to collegiate life! Have no fear, you’ll learn to adjust.
Part of that adjustment, we hope, is that you’ll develop a larger perspective, one that allows you to envision your dwelling place here as something much more than the room in which you stay. The Book of Proverbs tells us that “Wisdom has built her house.” That house is the whole of creation, which St. Francis de Sales tells us, reflects the “beauteous harmony, beauteous luster, and good grace” of the God who is its author. And within this divinely-created world, we believe that Center Valley is one such house where wisdom dwells.

So we invite you to check out the entire campus while you’re here. Take a walk – *a walk, not a drive!* – and explore our 400+ acres. You may be pleasantly surprised. Visit the statue atop the hill by the Heights and you’ll get a new view on things. Stroll to the Labuda Center at the other end of the mall and watch art come to life. Cross the street to visit the Connolly Chapel, and you’ll experience peacefulness. Come back here to Billera and join in the excitement of our athletic contests. In our Valley, there are many rooms and much wisdom: the beauty, the history, the characters, the stories – make all of it part of your new house.

The second, and most likely bigger, concern is food. You may discover that breakfast, lunch, and dinner are purely relative terms when it comes to what you eat and when. You’ll get plenty to eat in the DUC, even if you’re not always sure what it is! But let’s face it: none of this food will be mom’s cooking. Odds are that nothing will be made just the way you like it. Fear not, you’ll grow accustomed to it.

Along the way, we hope you’ll gain some new tastes and a broader appreciation for our distinctive menu. For we are prepared to offer you a different kind of food, one that feeds more than your bodies, just as Jesus does in today’s Gospel reading.

There Jesus points to a new kind of nourishment when he says: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven ... and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.” His Jewish audience thought this was ridiculous ... and they are absolutely correct! Anyone who thinks rationally or logically knows that such an idea is bizarre: no person is food for another person. That simply makes no sense. And that’s when Jesus repeats the offer: “the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” This food, he claims, is as true and real as any other, but with a longer-lasting nourishment, for “whoever eats this bread will live forever.”
A claim like that can’t be swallowed with mere logic and reasoning. To digest this notion takes an entirely different kind of thinking, one that transcends the natural and goes beyond the material. It requires a spiritual sense, a thinking with your heart and soul that yields certainty in belief and allows you to live in hope.

We will feed you this new food. We’ll challenge your minds by inviting you to wonder more than you ever have and to think differently than you are used to doing. But we’ll also help you to heed your heart, which “has its reasons that reason does not know at all” (BLAISE PASCAL, Les Pensées). And we’ll help you to see with your soul, in order to develop the capacity to entrust yourself to an Other and so enter into a relationship that is enlivening and enduring (cf. JOHN PAUL II, Fides et Ratio, #32).

And that’s why we begin your new generation with us in this celebration of the Mass. We invoke God to be an essential part of your experience – the same God whose wisdom created this world, who dwelt in our place human like us, and who gives us himself, really present, as nourishment for our lives.

May this God, who has brought you here to Center Valley this day, guide you in all your ways.

+ May God be praised +

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