

**Address by the President - Rector Magnificus
of Assumption University of Thailand
at the 41st Commencement Exercise
Queen Sirikit National Convention Center
Saturday, January 18, 2014**

Chairman of the University Council
President Emeritus
Campus Minister
Members of AU Community
Honored Guests
Families and Friends of the Graduates, and
Dear Graduates, Class XLI

It is an honor to stand here before AU graduates, Class of 2013. A few minutes ago, you were all with smiles and confidence walking off stage with your hard-earned diploma in hand; understandably so! Today is a very special day for you.

Congratulation for your impressive achievements! We are delighted that you chose AU for your educational journey.

You are not alone in celebrating this milestone in your lives. Our honored guests, AU administrators, faculty and staff members, alumni association representatives as well as your parents and close friends have joined you on this very special day.

Let me take this first opportunity to welcome them and thank them for making this 41st Commencement Exercises so distinctive.

I am especially grateful to Rev. Bro. Surasit Sukchai, the Provincial Superior of the Brothers of St. Gabriel, Province of Thailand, and chairman of our University Council and also to Rev. Bro. Prathip Martin Komolmas, President Emeritus, for their presence here today to witness and to congratulate you on your milestone of success. As graduates, you should remain grateful to AU administrators, faculty and staff including your parents and others who contribute to your success.

Today, I wish to talk to you about one particular moral value, *personal integrity*, one of the most important values AU has sought to instill in you and one of the essential ingredients of success, both on a personal and professional level. Consider, for example, what Warren Buffett, Chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, an investment company with 48 years of experience, has to say about

personal integrity in the workplace: **“In looking for people to hire, we look for three qualities; integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don’t have the first one, the other two will kill you.”** Buffett makes a compelling case for integrity as key to sustainability. The message is clear; hire people with no integrity (i.e., no core moral values) and you are doomed to run into troubles. Buffett has a point. Take, for instance, the banking industry. Examples abound on how the moral failings and lack of integrity of a number of mid-level and top managers have plagued the sector, resulting in heavy fines or even the collapse of entire financial institutions, including some iconic ones.

The same goes for one’s personal life. And not only will a lack of personal integrity poison our own life, it will also poison that of others. Take a look at some of the public figures around you and the havoc which their lack of personal integrity has wreaked! As Einstein (as cited in Angier, 2005, p. 132) pointed out, **“whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters.”**

I understand you may have been told about all this many times before. I also do understand that today is a day of rejoicing and that your attention may thus be elsewhere. However, it is clear from the on-campus behavior of some of you that the concept of integrity has yet to sink in and more needs to be said about it. So, do not look at this address as yet another presumptuous attempt at reforming you or telling you what to do with your own life. Instead let it be my Graduation Gift to you. As the Book of Proverbs (10:9) tells us: **“He who walks in integrity, walks securely.”** Call it what you want; moral integrity, personal integrity, wholeness of character, or character integrity, it all comes down to the same need for life-enhancing core values that will keep you and others out of trouble. And should my plea for attention remain unheeded today, please make sure to return to this address later on in your life. It is our hope that one day all this will resonate with you. So what is integrity?

What is Integrity?

The Oxford Dictionary defines **“integrity”** as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles, i.e., of being forthright both with oneself and with others (Hornby, 2010, p.781). As Spencer Johnson, the author of several New York Times bestsellers, put it, **“Integrity is telling myself the truth. And honesty is telling the truth to other people.”**

The French and Latin roots of the word add another notion; that of wholeness. Personal integrity is thus also about having a whole, undivided self. We all embrace certain values, such as, love, compassion, justice, which we then *integrate* into our own self. They operate as a beacon. But whatever talent or gift

we may have been endowed with, whatever degree we may have, whatever social or professional status we may enjoy, and whatever success life may bring our way, will eventually be of little avail to us if we fail to integrate them into a morally coherent set of core values.

Another key notion embedded in the concept of integrity is consistency. Integrity requires a person to be consistently honest, moral, and trustworthy and adopt values consistent with his/her own self. According to Dr. Henry Cloud, a renowned clinical psychologist and leadership consultant, people with integrity are consistently capable of doing the following:

1. Build and maintain trust;

To be able to connect and build trust with people. Before people can trust, you must have certain character fit for such experience.

2. Be able to see and face reality;

We must be in touch with what is; confront facts, see reality clearly and deal with it.

3. Work in a way that brings results;

Successful people stick to what they are good at and find ways to make that larger. At the same time, surround themselves with people who are good at the areas they do not possess.

4. Embrace negative realities and solve them;

In your life (be it business, personal or social), you will encounter problems, and be able to embrace obstacles that get in the way and resolve them, that is character.

5. Cause growth and develop;

You must have “curiosity” – the desire to grow, learn, master things, discover, and become more than you are. Work hard to learn and develop skills first and train diligently to get better all the time. As mention earlier, your work alone cannot fulfill all of your needs as a person. You have to find balance in all areas of life. Do not be afraid to go out and seek it.

6. Achieve transcendence and meaning in life;

To flourish, we must bow to the things larger than us. The greatest people are the ones who have not sought greatness, but served greatly the causes, values, and missions that were much bigger than them.

The message is clear. We should always make sure not to let ourselves be driven and guided by our instinctual impulses. Seek instead to transcend our lives and enlighten ourselves so to be bigger than our appetites. Each one of us, in one's lifetime, must adopt certain values (e.g. love, compassion, justice, freedom, honesty, faithfulness, responsibility, etc.). These values form a lot of a person's character.

Integrity presupposes steadfast adherence to a strict code of ethics. The lure of popular culture values, however, often proves too hard to resist, all the more so today, ethics and the values it encompasses do not carry as much weight as they once did. This is precisely where character strength comes into play. To paraphrase Thomas S. Monson, an American clergyman known for his aphorisms, **“Perhaps the surest test of an individual's integrity is his refusal to do or say anything that would damage his self-respect.”** Easier said than done since there is no shortage of temptations to which to succumb even though most if not all lack depth and substance. Obviously, Monson's recipe for maintaining self-respect and having integrity requires much strength of character.

Strength of Character and Integrity

Integrity and character are closely related so much so that they get mixed up. Character is commonly defined as the sum of the qualities, attributes, traits, and abilities a person possesses. It forges our personality and guides our actions. The places we go to, the things we do, and the people we associate with say something about our character. Our own personal experiences largely shape who we are and imprint certain patterns of behavior in us. But for the most part the choices we make are our own. We do not have to let others dictate our behaviors and determine who we are and the values we should espouse through all sorts of shallow enticements. We have the ability to retain that power on our own. We also have the power to sort out the defining moments in our lives and draw the appropriate lessons from them through self-discipline. You will undoubtedly go through experiences that will stretch your ability to remain true to yourself and maintain moral integrity. But there lies your strength of character and your maturity. You have to be aware of your behavior and make self-corrections.

In brief, character is who you are. It defines you and guides your actions. Whereas integrity is steadfast adherence to a strict moral ethical code, doing the right thing for the right reason even when no one is watching. The wonderful thing about character and integrity which are intimately related, is that they are one of the few things in life that no one will ever be able to forcefully take away from you.

Of course, you cannot change if you do not want to. By the same token, you cannot expect others to change what you refuse to change in yourself. Developing personal integrity requires you to examine your beliefs and values systems and take conscious steps to behave in ways that align with your personal moral code. From time to time, ask yourself: Am I a Person of Integrity?

Do you want to live in a world utterly devoid of integrity? Do you want your parents, teachers, friends, employers or your doctor, lawyer not to mention politicians or any other person with authority or influence over you to constantly deceive or mislead you? Do you want to keep deluding yourself with false values and be prey to the many entrapments that surround us? Most likely not! So make sure you reconcile or keep these wishes in line with your own behavior and ethics.

As you will have gathered by now, **the message I wish you to take home is quite simple: you must have personal integrity, that is, you must be honest with yourself and others and lead a life that is consistent with your moral principles.** I understand that in today's world, this may be a challenge. But who you want to be depends on you, solely on you. This is where your education – and its moral component – can make a difference.

Dear Graduates,

Your studies have prepared you for the challenges and opportunities ahead. As you are about to enter the real world and fend for yourself, I would like to encourage you to use the knowledge you have gained at AU to carve out new challenges for yourself, reach your goals, and – last but not least – strive to make the world a better place. And always keep in mind that life is a journey to completeness, which cannot be dissociated from personal integrity.

On campus, you may have opted to follow your whims and fancy and not heed advice from administrators and faculty members even though they were meant to lay solid foundations for your character formation and thus, as I mentioned earlier in reference to the Book of Proverbs, meant for you to walk through life “**securely.**” Anyhow, it's never too late to start and make your life meaningful. And for those who have already chosen that path, you can continue to build on it. That way, you will never become a nuisance to yourself and to others.

I wish you every success in all your endeavors and join everyone here in offering my most sincere congratulations to each of you once more on your academic accomplishments. Remember that learning is a lifelong process. And remain grateful to all those who contribute to your success.

You are invited to come back and visit your alma mater whenever you have an opportunity to do so for you are now part of AU family.

I pray that the Almighty God will take good care of you. May He continue to show you the way, so that you will see the truth and meet your expectations in life as well as those of others! May you also be blessed with happiness and prosperity.

May God bless you always!

Bancha Saenghiran, f.s.g., Ph.D.

President - Rector Magnificus

January 18, 2014

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