

I. Introduction

- A. The Book of Ecclesiastes helps us identify the seasons of our lives. You, our graduates, arrayed in elegance behind me, now transition from one season of your lives to another as you depart the halls of the Convent of the Sacred Heart to begin your studies at many prestigious universities.**
- B. Truly it is a time to plant and to build, to laugh and to dance - yet as you realize the 'no turning back' quality of this day, you may also find it a time to mourn and to weep.**
- C. This is a day when the seasons of your life congeal as you part with the past and move on to the future.**

II. Madeline Sophie

- A. Of course, ideas like that are repeated endlessly by people like me to graduating classes like you. And the only reason I take the risk of sounding inane is because you possess an interpreter of life's seasons that few other graduates can claim. Her name is Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat, whom all of you know as the founder of the Society of the Sacred Heart and patron of your school.**
- B. Let me say a word about the seasons of her life because they are instructive about the seasons in ours - and because she can pray for us and guide us in every season.**
- C. first be forewarned that the seasons of Madeline Sophie's life were not always temperate! True enough, she was raised in a faith-filled household in the very shadow of the parish church where she was taught to know and love the Lord and her faith**

by her devoted parents and an extraordinary brother. It was there that her splendid intellectual gifts first shone forth and arrangements were made for her to continue her education, especially in classical languages and literature.

- D. That temperate season was followed by the French Revolution's Reign of Terror (from which her family did not entirely escape) - coupled with the influence of Jansenism,...

... a heretically gloomy version of Christianity.

It is hard to think of circumstances

more likely than these to stifle the voice of God in a young person

... but the Lord had in mind another season for Madeline Sophie, a never-ending season of love.

For in the midst of terror and gloom,

she discovered, in the power of the Holy Spirit,

the deep and abiding love of God revealed

in the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

She was spared a distorted version of the faith,

and instead embraced the living and true faith, faith in the Redeemer and in his Church.

- E. And that led her to a season of growth.

She embraced the vocation of religious life

and became part of a new religious family,

the Society of the Sacred Heart.

Her natural leadership abilities were recognized so in 1806 at the age of 23, Madeline Sophie, became the Superior General.

She governed with kindness, humility, & gentleness but also effectiveness

as she oversaw eighty foundations in France, North America,

Switzerland, Belgium, Algiers, England, Ireland, Spain, Holland,

Germany, South America, Austria, and Poland.

The schools she established challenged students to grow intellectually and to develop their God-given talents and character.

They also encouraged students to respond to God's love in their lives

by growing in virtue and by developing a life of prayer,

with special emphasis on devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Madeline demonstrated how to one's natural talents are not destroyed but enhanced when harnessed for God's purposes!

- F. We would badly misunderstand Saint Madeline Sophie, however, if we concluded that her life was all about exterior success – pins on maps showing where she had convents and schools. The real season of growth in her life was interior as more and more she opened her heart to the Sacred Heart. There, in the ambit of Christ’s love, she confronted those doubts, misunderstandings, setbacks, and sorrows that are a part of every life - and those that were particular to her. Here growth came more slowly and painfully as she journeyed deep into the love of God. It was the season of dying to self and rising with Christ, of being transformed from coldness to warmth, from darkness into light. Her inward journey into the heart of God’s love marked her every decision as a religious and as an educator.

III. Madeline Sophie and the Graduates

- A. Today Saint Madeline Sophie beckons to you, our graduates, from a season of unending joy. From her place in eternity, in a spirit of Madeline Sophie is at the ready to accompany you as you enter upon the unfolding seasons of your life –
- B. She will be there for you in times of growth and building as you continue your education, perhaps to the highest levels, and then respond to the many career opportunities that may well come your way. She will be there for you as you continue to build your character and to establish your reputation as a person and as a professional. She will stay with you as you reflect on your God-given vocation, and perhaps discover you are called to marriage & family life or perhaps even to the consecrated life, as she was.
- C. If you take St. Madeline Sophie as your companion and guide through life’s various seasons, she will insist that you open your hearts to the one heart that loves you completely and for your own sake,

... and that is the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

With gentle persistence, she will not fail to encourage you to practice your faith, to pray each day, to center your life on the Eucharist, to grow in virtue, to be fair-minded, and to be generous servants of the poor and needy.

She knows you need these things if you are not only to survive but to flourish in the less temperate seasons that are bound to occur in your lives.

D. You may not have to endure the French Revolution's reign of terror but you are entering a world that is no stranger to terror - whether it is inflicted from without or within.

You and I are also part of a world where image trumps truth and anxiety over appearances dominates.

And while the gloom of Jansenism is a thing of the past, we surely do live under the dictatorship of relativism, as Pope Benedict XVI famously said.

Ours is an age of deep religious confusion, with many distorted versions of Christianity in the public square and even with the Church .

This great saint will help you fend your way through the thicket, not merely for the sake of doctrinal rectitude

but mostly so that you will truly know the Lord who loved you to the point of death - and in the company of the Church -

make that interior journey deep into God's love -

a journey which entails confronting even our unspoken fears,

a journey that leads to unending season of happiness

she now enjoys.

E. May she be a good guide for all the seasons of your life! As I reviewed your record of accomplishments, I can see she's been with you even until now.

Conclusion

May God bless and keep you in his love, now and always!