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Commencement 2023: Dean G. Marcus Cole's charge to the graduating class

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Joseph A. Matson Dean and Professor of Law G. Marcus Cole delivered the following charge to Notre Dame Law School's Class of 2023 during the Law School's Hooding Ceremony on May 20, 2023, in Purcell Pavilion.

As the Dean of Notre Dame Law School, let me be among the first to congratulate you — the Class of 2023 — on this momentous achievement.

While these three years seem to have gone by very quickly, I hope that you can see that you have changed. You are not the same person who came to Notre Dame three years ago.

Still, some things have remained unchanged. The doctoral hood that I placed on your shoulders flows from a tradition that began at the very first Western University — the University of Bologna — one thousand years ago. It symbolizes your special training, and your elevated role in our society. It is the highest public expression of honor that the faculty of an institution can bestow upon an individual, and we bestowed it upon you. As it did in Bologna a thousand years ago, the hood that you now wear signifies that you are learned in the law. The very first people upon whom the title of “doctor” was conferred at Bologna were lawyers, just like you.

Despite plagues and pandemics, wars and revolutions, famines and floods, the world has always been in need of lawyers, and the rule of law that we make possible. What you have achieved to get to this point is noteworthy.

I hope that you will also notice that your hood is different than that of other lawyers. You may notice that the velvet on the hood of some of your professors is purple. That royal purple, the color reserved for kings, is universal for lawyers everywhere.

But your hood is royal blue. It is different than that of any other law graduate. It is the royal blue of Mary, Queen of Heaven. It is different, because you are different.

With this hood, you become what we call “a different kind of lawyer.”

As a Notre Dame lawyer, you are now uniquely equipped to change the world — a world desperately in need of the change that only you can bring. Your legal training here at Notre Dame gives you power — a power that not everyone has. You can now go forth and satisfy the requirements to act on behalf of others — to fight for their rights.

Your *legal* training positions you to secure a license to practice law.

But your *Notre Dame* training should be more than that. It should give you more than a license to practice law.

It should give you a license to practice love.

We are living through a time when unthinkable acts of brutality and violence are being committed against people. Russian soldiers are shooting Ukrainian civilians in the back. School children are being shot in their classrooms. And in Hong Kong, a 90-year-old Catholic priest by the name of Joseph Cardinal Zen, the former Bishop of Hong Kong, has been imprisoned because he has spoken out about the injustices of the Chinese Communist Party.

If there was ever a time when the world needed a different kind of lawyer, it is now.

If there was ever a time for lawyers to be active, and vocal, and **brave**, it is now.

If there was ever a time for lawyers to practice love, it is now.

Whatever area of law you choose to practice, in whatever community you choose to live, don't forget where you came from.

You came *to* Notre Dame, and now you come *from* Notre Dame.

You are one of us. That should mean something. That should mean that the world will become a better place because of you.

Fifty years ago, University of Notre Dame President Father Theodore Hesburgh dedicated the Law Library with the following prayer, and it is my prayer for you:

May there be a hunger for justice.

May our students seek competence in the law, since compassion without competence would be a cruel hoax upon those they serve.

May they also realize that competence in the law without compassion leads the lawyer to use the law for other purposes than the works of justice, blinds him [or her] to the sad plight of persons who suffer injustice for want of a lawyer champion.

May these students in their lawyer lives ever avoid that which bends the law to ignoble ends.

May these students learn the majesty of the law in this place, and, through the practice of law, may they earn for themselves and others the blessings of the God of Justice, not the least of which is personal and civic peace, which is at the same time both the noblest work and the first fruit of justice among just [people] working for the creation of a just society.

That is my prayer for you, to be a Notre Dame lawyer. "A different kind of lawyer."

Yes, practice law, but also practice love.

Thank you.