

Address of Thanks



Maxine Francesco Gwyneth C. Baculo, MD
Valedictorian, UST-FMS Class of 2025

Rev. Fr. Isaias D. Tiongco, OP, Vice-Rector of the University of Santo Tomas; Rev. Fr. Maximo P. Gatela, OP, Regent of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery; Prof. Dr. Maria Lourdes D. Maglinao, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery; Prof. Dr. Remedios D. Dee-Chan, Asst. Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery; Assoc. Prof. Dr. Citadel C. De Castro, Secretary of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery; Prof. Dr. Maria Minerva P. Calimag, President of the UST Medical Alumni Association; department chairs; esteemed faculty members; support staff; parents; dear guests and my beloved Batch 2025 — a blessed morning to us all.

Just a few days ago, a younger colleague came up to me and asked, “*Kuya*, what inspired you to enter medicine?”

It made me pause and reflect: Was it the kind pediatrician who cared for me back then? Or the impressive surgeons I admired on *Grey’s Anatomy*? Was it the parents of my classmates who would arrive at PTA meetings still wearing their white coats? Or maybe it was the brilliant doctors I watched on TV every weekend on *Salamat Dok*?

I would be lying if I said these people did not influence me. But if I am being completely honest, my inspiration to enter medicine came from something deeper. It came from witnessing service — service in its rawest, most humble form.

Before I started flipping through pages of medical textbooks, it was my dad, JR, flipping burgers at Jollibee as a crew member, sharing stories of how he was able to eat burgers he accidentally overcooked. Before I saw a surgeon close a wound with precision in each suture, I saw my dad paint walls and barangay signs with the same careful hand in each stroke.

Before I stood through long hours of edema rounds, in which we present cases in the ward to consultants, it was my mom, Lala, standing even

longer from opening to closing time as a saleslady at SM. Just as we are expected to memorize every patient in the wards, my mom knew by heart every fabric in the textile section of the department store.

Before I ever learned that eating too much seafood and monggo could cause gout, I knew them as a source of income for our family—fresh seafood that my father hauled to the public market before sunrise and monggo that my mother cooked to serve at our small *karinderia*.

Before I learned to advocate for patients, it was my two grandfathers—Lolo Nilo and Daddy Ding—who taught me justice. Lolo Nilo was a journalist investigating local corruption and Daddy Ding, a forester fighting illegal logging in the mountains of Oriental Mindoro. They taught me to stand for what was right, even when it was hard. Lolo Nilo paid the ultimate price—he was gunned down by unknown assailants. His life reminded me that those who fight for justice do not always get the justice they deserve—but they still choose to do what is right.

Before I found the courage to enter medical school, there was Mommy Fe—my paternal grandmother, a businesswoman and arguably the bravest woman I know. She taught me to try, even when afraid. To begin, even when uncertain. She showed me that life demands a heart that refuses to quit. Because life does not hand you success—you hustle your way to it.

Before I discovered my love for teaching peers and younger colleagues, there was Mommy Rosela—my maternal grandmother, a teacher and principal who shaped generations of students. Her legacy lives on not just in those she taught, but in me—every time I share what I have learned.

It was through witnessing these quiet, everyday acts of service that I first dreamed of becoming a doctor. I am, in truth, the product of every sacrifice and silent labor that brought me to this moment. I

carry with me the calloused hands that labored, the tired feet that walked and the hearts that never stopped believing.

But this story is not just mine.

Each one of us here today has our own version of service, sacrifice and struggle. Behind every M.D. is a story—a story of late nights and early mornings, of parents skipping comforts so we could afford tuition, buy textbooks, or pay rent. A story of long nights spent reviewing while the rest of the world slept, of meals skipped, tears shed quietly in bedrooms and prayers whispered between exams.

Some of us left our provinces to chase this dream, far from the familiarity of home and comfort of family. Others stayed close but carried just as heavy a load—balancing school while caring for sick relatives, raising younger siblings, or holding together households quietly falling apart. Some were working students, juggling side hustles just to stay afloat. Some were alone, navigating heartbreak and mental health struggles—yet still showed up, still studied, still served.

There are those among us who lost parents and never had the chance to hear them say, “Congratulations, *anak*”. Classmates who sat through lectures while grieving, who put on their uniforms and scrubs even when their hearts were breaking. Some bore the weight of expectations as the first doctor in the family. Most of us questioned—at more than one point—whether we were meant to be here at all.

And yet—here we are.

They say becoming a doctor takes intelligence, talent and skill. But those of us here know the deeper truth. What got us through was not brilliance—it was grit. It was persistence. The quiet kind of strength that does not boast, but endures.

It was reading the same line in Harrison’s for the fifth time, not understanding it—and reading it a sixth time anyway. It was hands shaking in the middle of rounds, not knowing if it was hunger or fear. The heartbreak of losing a patient. The fear that maybe we were not good enough.

We were taught every enzyme and molecule in the Krebs cycle. But no textbook ever prepared us on what to say when a mother asked why her child did not make it. Indeed, we have learned that medicine does not just test what we know—it tests who we are.

And yet, we stayed. We chose medicine, again and again. Not because it was easy—but because we could not imagine walking away.

Fortunately, we never walked it alone.

So, before we take our next steps, allow me to look back—and say thank you to the people who supported us throughout this journey.

To God—Thank You for the small miracles, the second chances and for placing the right people in my life at exactly the right time. I know I could not have done this by my own strength.

To my parents, Mama and Papa—*sa wakas, may doktor na tayo sa pamilya*. Your sacrifices are reflected in every sleepless night, every exam I passed and every patient I have cared for. This victory is just as much yours as it is mine. *Mahal na mahal ko po kayo*.

To my little brother, Gyann—I hope this shows you that no dream is ever too big. I will always be here for you, guiding you, just as you have quietly inspired me more than you know.

To my extended family, my grandparents, *ninongs, ninangs, titos, titas* and cousins, and to my friends from Oriental Mindoro, Batangas and Nueva Ecija—your unwavering love, prayers and timely words of encouragement carried me through when I no longer had the strength to carry myself.

To Fr. Gatela, Dean Maglinao, Asst. Dean Dee-Chan, Dr. De Castro and Dr. Maranion—thank you for checking in when things got hard, for your constant encouragement and for helping us feel seen and supported. Dean, your intellect and grace have set a standard we aspire to uphold. We are deeply honored to have been shaped under your leadership.

To all our faculty members, fellows and residents—thank you for teaching us not just the science, but the heart of medicine. You gave us wisdom, perspective and sometimes the tough love that shaped us into who we needed to become. Special thanks to Dr. Larry King for the countless lessons, both inside and outside the hospital and serving as my mentor ever since LEAPMed.

To the LC Foundation, Inc., led by CEO Mr. William Liu—on behalf of the LC scholars, thank you for making our medical education possible. Without your generosity, this journey would have remained out of reach.

To my core friend group—Jhem, Mika, Alianna, Ellen, Sofia, Jerico and Mulbert—six years of tears, laughter and loyalty. You are the family I chose, and I would choose you guys again in every lifetime.

To Section A—especially my beloved subsection A3 and A4, to my friends from Section B, C and D, and my friends ever since LEAPMed—thank you for the moments of encouragement, for standing by me through every challenge and for reminding me that no hurdle was ever faced alone.

To the often unsung heroes of our campus and hospitals—the guidance counselors who kept our secrets, office clerks who made the impossible paperwork possible, security guards who protected us, canteen workers who nourished our tired bodies, janitors who cleaned our messes without complaint, the technician who fixed the broken projector minutes before our presentations, laboratory assistants and morticians working overtime. Ma’am Ruby, Sir Boyet, Sir Marvin and to all the support staff—thank you.

To all our previous patients and their families—thank you for letting us hold your hands through your hardest moments. And to the patients we lost and to our silent mentors, our cadavers, thank you for your final gift of knowledge. We honor you in every life we will try to save.

To our community partners—especially the people of Brgy. 429 and Brgy. 458 of Sampaloc, Manila, and the senior citizens near San Lorenzo Ruiz Parish in Dagat-Dagatan, Navotas—thank you for opening your homes and hearts to us.

To the nurses, medical technologists, pharmacists, therapists and all allied health professionals we have worked with—thank you for reminding us that no doctor ever heals alone. We could not have done this without you.

Lastly, to all those whose names we never got to know—the nursing aide who cleaned the OR at 2 a.m., the person at records who stayed late to find a missing chart, the driver who ensured we got to the hospital on time, the elevator operator who smiled

and made our day better and countless others behind the scenes—thank you.

Indeed, the two letters we add to our names today do not belong to us alone. They belong to every person who walked this road with us. We are because of them.

From the bottom of my heart — *maraming, maraming salamat po.*

So, I would like to invite all of us, just for a few moments, to turn our attention to the people who have supported us. Take this moment to find them in the crowd. Lock eyes with them. Smile. Wave. Blow them a kiss. Flash a finger heart. Whisper a thank you. Give them a nod or a thumbs-up. Whatever speaks your heart.

So go ahead, graduates—say thank you. *Sa pagmamahal. Sa panalangin. Sa paniniwala. Sa lahat ng sakripisyo.*

Before we go our separate ways, let me share three final reminders.

First, stay humble. Let us remember that no matter how much we know, we will never know everything. That every patient is a teacher and every encounter is a lesson.

Second, in a world that tells you to harden—to armor up, to grow cold in order to survive—choose softness. In a world that pushes us to reach for the sky, I challenge you to dream deeper—to root your dreams in meaning and compassion.

Lastly, do it for the people. Medicine was never meant to make us rich in wealth, but rich in purpose. Because when the scalpel has no place, when the cure is out of reach, it is the tenderness of our words, stillness of our presence and warmth of our compassion that become our most powerful tools. For sometimes, the greatest healing comes not from what we do, but from who we are.

May this be the principle that guides us, inspiring us to be the best physicians we can be, to serve with the biggest hearts and to shine with the brightest light. Our legacy begins today.

Congratulations, UST Medicine Class of 2025!