

**Good morning, distinguished faculty, dedicated staff, beloved family and friends, and my fellow graduates.**

I stand before you today filled with gratitude, love, and humility. First, I thank God for guiding me here—for carrying me through every trial and blessing me with this moment.

Today is not just a ceremony. It is a milestone, a celebration of resilience, and a testament to the power of hope. UMT has been more than a university for me; it has been a place of transformation. It allowed me to pursue higher education while still living life to the fullest, following my dreams, and honoring my responsibilities. It is a place that offers flexibility, compassion, and unwavering support.

Because of that flexibility, I was able to balance many roles: running my small business, being a mother and grandmother, and nurturing my personal relationships—all while pursuing my academic goals. Through perseverance, determination, and the unwavering support of my family and friends, I now stand here today with a master's degree in hand.

But the path that brought me here was not easy. I grew up with so little, in a home where dreams often felt too heavy for a child to hold. My parents were my pillars of strength, doing everything they could to ensure that their children received an education. I remember studying by the flickering light of a candle, tracing letters and equations on scraps of paper while the wind rattled the walls. We often lacked school supplies and uniforms. Yet in those moments, I felt the silent prayers of my parents—prayers that carried me forward when nothing else could.

If you had told that little girl studying under candlelight that one day she would earn a master's degree from the University of Management and Technology, she might have laughed through her tears. But here I am—because of faith, resilience, and, above all, self-belief.

Self-belief is not always loud. Sometimes it is just a whisper—the quiet voice urging you to study for one more hour, the stubbornness to try again when the door is closed, and the courage to walk into a classroom even when you feel you don't belong.

And along the way, I discovered something important: education is not just about books or degrees. It is about transformation. It changes the way we see the world, and it equips us with the tools to change the world itself. My journey is proof that

education is not limited by background, age, or circumstance. Education belongs to anyone who dares to believe they are worthy of it.

To the faculty and staff at UMT—thank you for your patience, your encouragement, and your commitment. In moments when I struggled, you reminded me, “You can.” You created space for a girl from a small island and gave her the tools to turn possibility into reality.

And to my fellow graduates— Today, we celebrate not only our academic achievement but the resilience, compassion, and strength that carried us here.

As we step into the next chapter, let us carry more than knowledge—we must carry compassion, responsibility, and purpose. The world we are entering needs leaders who are not only educated but also empathetic. Use your education not only to build your own future, but to lift others, to open doors, and to bring light into dark places.

Class of 2025—never lose hope. No beginning is too small, and no darkness is too deep. My journey—from studying by candlelight in a home without electricity to standing here today as a master’s graduate—proves that with resilience, faith, and love, we can change the story of our lives.

Finally, to my daughter Chanel and her family, my son serving in South Korea, my boyfriend, Dr. Travis, and my Rizzo family—thank you for your unwavering support. And to UMT, faculty, staff—thank you for giving me this opportunity and guiding me.

To my fellow graduates: let us step forward with courage in our hearts, wisdom in our hands, and hope on our lips. Let us shine our light so brightly that one day, another child studying by candlelight will stand where we stand today—not only with a degree in hand, but with the power to inspire the next generation.

Never stop learning. Never forget where you came from. And never stop believing in where you can go.

**Congratulations, Class of 2025. And thank you.**