The LCI academic year officially concluded with a graduation ceremony taking place on Sunday, May 21st. I’ve only been here for a semester, but could literally see the fruits of five months of learning English and of deepening the faith in the lives of each one of our 14 graduates. I can only imagine what fruits were present to the directors and teachers that have been here since their first day in Gaming. Joy filled the air, but we all sensed the sadness that comes when people move on to a new journey. We all kept saying “It’s not the end. It’s just the beginning.” The students get to take what they learned with them wherever they go in life, including all of the catechesis and English. They also can share some amazing stories of what it was like to live with the American college students from Franciscan University for a whole year. Gaming changes lives, and I was amazed at how the journey of the LCI students became so much a part of my journey.

We spent Sunday evening reminiscing on what this past year has been like. Two of our Chinese seminarians both expressed how much God challenged them, but gave them so much peace. Our only Greek Catholic, also known as Byzantine Catholic, explained how difficult it was for her to come to Roman Catholic Mass at times. It wasn’t that she didn’t believe, but she was always used to her the Byzantine traditions in Slovakia. She was able to participate in both liturgies each week, and spent much time with Roman Catholics in the classroom and in her free time. She overcame herself so much, and exemplified what it means to have the East and West unite in the Catholic faith. I was most moved by our student from Georgia, and the strength it took for her to come to LCI. Georgia is a country of mostly Orthodox Christians, and if you are not Orthodox then you are considered wrong. She was able to thrive in a completely Catholic community where we supported her endeavors. She explained how she’s been nourished and cared for in every single way including advancing in her English level, developing a strong prayer life, having a place to live, most importantly having a community that is centered around growing in holiness. My heart was overwhelmed when I heard these personal testimonies.

My journey hasn’t been joyful every single moment, but each step of the way has brought me closer to the Lord. I struggled with a family tragedy two weeks into the semester, and literally never thought I would survive it. I have been able to keep going, because of the LCI students and their inspiring faith. They accepted me from the very beginning, and when they found out something had happened to my family, they were my support system. At the same time, in the classroom I was given hands-on training in teaching English, and how to better Catechize. I was always nervous for each lesson I taught, but the students were always so attentive to me no matter what. The students wanted to learn, and that made me want to work harder to help them. The students were so diligent in their school work and prayer lives, and were the ones inviting me to their daily Rosary in the chapel. It’s not that I wasn’t praying, but they are such a loving community that they wanted others to be involved in their prayer, or game nights, or even a movie night. Working with students one-on-one inspired me even more.

The personal relationships in Gaming have been important for the success of each student and for myself as I was formed for the CMC program. They each were assigned an American tutor, and both Carol and I worked with them as well. I also spent time with one student at the gym some nights. Sometimes it was someone needing to go to the store to buy groceries and I needed to go too, so we went together. This entire experience is all about community and encounters. The encounters are with each other, but also with Christ in His Church. God has been so good to us here, and continues to work in the hearts of every single person that comes through Gaming.