

Baccalaureate Address

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- Congratulations to all of you graduating from high school.
- Such an exciting time in your life—the first significant hurdle of your young lives.
- I was remembering when I graduated high school so long ago now—everyone so excited at their future prospects...you're planning what's ahead, your moms and dads and the community are “O so proud of you”.
- And while graduation seems a great goal for you to have achieved—it truly is only the beginning...and as the saying goes: “You ain't seen nuthin' yet.”
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- You're reaching adulthood, and all of you are dreaming of the comparative freedom that adulthood and leaving home means.
- Many, if not most of you, will be leaving home...maybe going off to college or to some other schooling so that you can pursue a chosen career.
- And that is something you will do well to take note of—you're graduating from one school, and now heading toward another... whether it be formal education, or the school of “hard knocks”.
- In any case, you'll find that education in life never really ends—one way or the other...whether it be in formal education, or simply by work and experience.
- Those who have neither experience nor a desire to learn are a dime a dozen...but these days, those who seek knowledge and are dependable are rare commodities...and they are highly treasured.
- So develop of love of learning... because learning equips you better and better for combating the difficulties that you will inevitably encounter in life.
- Cultivate a love for challenge and for overcoming obstacles which cross your path—whatever they may be.

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- Disdain mediocrity; seek always the path of excellence.
- Anyone can choose the easy path—and there will be many who will urge you to take it.
- But the person of character and strength seeks the greater rewards which are only found on the more difficult road—that path which far fewer dare to tread—whether it be in your secular OR your religious life.
- It is on this road that you build confidence within yourself and the tenacity to stare the challenges of life square in the face and conquer whatever it throws at you.
- He who never ventures, never gains...and yet do all with an eye toward what is truly good.

- It is surprising how much we love hero movies—the ones in which the hero exhibits that humility found in true strength and true wisdom...who respects all people...who will risk and sacrifice everything in order to do what is right and good.
- Where is it that so many lose that ideal? Where is it that our selfishness overcomes our admiration of generosity, where is it that dishonesty and pettiness overcome love of honor...where is it that contempt and arrogance replace respect for every man and woman...where is it does laziness and petulance overwhelm our sense of duty to God and to our fellow man?
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- While he walked the earth, Jesus affirmed the two great commandments: *Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.*
- In these two great commandments, he said, is summed up all the law and the prophets—and because they come from God, by very

definition no greater rules of life can be imagined or formulated, much less put into practice.

- In these two commandments is the greatest of honors—not worthless honors that man gives that sparkle today but are dust tomorrow--and may even be contrary to the good--but rather the everlasting honor that only God can give...the reward for always seeking ardently what is truly good and truly right.
 - The honor which comes from seeking the good of others and not simply the good of yourself.
 - The honor which comes from being able to accept criticism humbly and to act upon it if that criticism is justified.
 - The honor which comes from respecting every man and woman—knowing that they are made in the image of God, and for whom Jesus gave His own life on the cross.
 - The honor of integrity—making your word your bond regardless of the consequences...letting your yes mean yes, and your no mean no.
 - The honor of charity and love and kindness toward others... in feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick, the lonely and those in prison, and defending those who cannot defend themselves.
- For “*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” (John 15:13 RSV)
- But I warn you—to walk that path of virtue and the pursuit of what is right will be to invite ridicule from the world.
- There will always be those who will encourage self-seeking... those who will not blink an eye at exploiting others...those who will gleefully lie, cheat and steal in order to get ahead.

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- And yet...those who do such things have lost sight of truth and honor...and they have lost sight of God.
- But be better than that...because you can be better than that, and you ARE better than that.
- With this graduation begin your lives with a clean slate...knowing that you are called to be the seeds of goodness in the world, transforming our culture from within.
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- What does it matter if some call you foolish?
- In the words of St. Paul: “... *consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong...* (1Co 1:26-29 RSV)
- Your task in life is not to win the empty praise of men, but to always seek the Good, and in doing so to always seek God.
- As the apostles said to their persecutors: “*We must obey God rather than men.*”
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- Finally, I would like to share with you a saying from Mother Teresa which I shared with my congregation recently, and which is a good reminder of what the good person faces, and how they should handle it:
- "People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.
- If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish motives. Do good anyway.
- If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

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- The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.
- Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway.
- What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
- People who really want help may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway.
- Give the world the best you have and you may get hurt. Give the world your best anyway.
- Why? Because in the final analysis, all of this is between you and God...It was never between you and them anyway."
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- So, in closing, as you venture out into the world, I urge you on with the formula of knighthood from the movie "The Kingdom of Heaven:
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 - *Be without fear in the face of your enemies.*
 - *Be brave and upright that God may love thee.*
 - *Speak the truth always, even if it leads to your death.*
 - *Safeguard the helpless and do no wrong.*

And as the king in that movie said:

Remember that...your soul is in your keeping alone, even though those who presume to play you be kings or men of power. When you stand before God, you cannot say, "But I was told by others to do thus," or that virtue was not convenient at the time. This will not suffice.

And so...

The LORD bless you and keep you:

The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you:

The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

(Num 6:24-26 RSV)