

Good morning,

It is a pleasure and an honor to speak to the graduating class of 2019. When Dr. Crowley told me I had been elected as speaker, I thought about the first time most of the faculty laid eyes on you as you paraded into Memorial Gym, greeted by the applause of the upperclassmen and the faculty. It was, I am sure, a stirring moment of welcome for you to a school where you would excel in many areas. And even though we were welcoming you into our school community, in a way you were actually welcoming the opportunities and challenges that would await you over the next four years. You were about to experience a lot more homework, classmates from different cities and towns, and some impossible to make athletic teams. And now, look at you- scholars, servant leaders, drama festival winners, league and state athletic champions. You have mastered MLA format,(I hope), some arcane laws of thermodynamics, difficult quadratic equations and how to avoid Dean Richards when you forgot to put on a belt. But your challenges and opportunities are not over, you are about to welcome a whole new set of them into your lives. I think about the word welcome often these days, especially since it may be developing some negative connotations in our society. And, as those of you who were in my classes know, I also think a lot about the play Hamlet. In Act Four, Ophelia observes “Lord we know what we are but not what we might be.” And since you are going to spend the next few years experiencing a perfect opportunity to become what you might be, I thought that I

might spend some time taking about the varied opportunities you will have to welcome those different experiences that will help you become what you might be.

Welcome the opportunity to revel in the diversity you are about to encounter in college. You will be going to school with people from every state, many different nations, and, believe it or not, with people whose x chromosomes outnumber their y chromosomes. Honest. Take advantage of this diversity to learn about different cultures, different world views and different allegiances. Look for the opportunity to have your suppositions challenged, your truths shaken and, in the face of a cogent and logical argument, your opinions changed. Be open and receptive to new and different ways of looking at the world.

For the past four years, this excellent and dedicated faculty has taught you to read voraciously, think insightfully and write eloquently. Welcome the opportunity to dazzle your professors with your abilities. Don't be afraid to make an impact in your classes and to call attention (in a good way) to yourselves. And, by the way, this is an excellent chance for an English teacher to pitch reading. Be lifelong readers, gobble up books as fast as you can. Kafka tells us that reading breaks up the ice jams in our minds. Never before have we needed the rivers of wisdom and the steams of truth to flow as freely as possible in our society, and reading will guarantee this progression.

In 1654, the philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote that "All of humanity's problems stem from our inability to sit quietly in a

room alone." So, welcome the opportunity to experience quiet. Find a place on campus where you can go to just listen to your hearts. Turn off all the devices and let the quiet enfold you. Start small- a few minutes a day. At the very least you may discover more about your true selves, about who you truly are, and, at the very best, you may encounter what Wordsworth calls the presence that disturbs him with the joy of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime that rolls through all things.

You are going to discover so much about what your college has to offer. Welcome the chance to enroll in a course you never even knew existed. Investigate clubs and activities that are totally new to you. Play an intramural sport that you never thought about. If you have the resources, think about a semester spent abroad. Learn to play an oboe. Become fluent in a world language. Continue to immerse yourselves in service activities. In the course of these experiences, you very well may discover what Joseph Campbell calls your bliss, your path to becoming what you are truly meant to become and what will truly bring you happiness and satisfaction. And don't be surprised if the path to this bliss turns out to be something that you had never expected. I myself can assure you that there is no better way to spend your life than in doing what you love and loving what you do. However, campus life will also offer opportunities to make some questionable decisions. If and when you make those questionable decisions, welcome the chance to develop resilience and self-advocacy. Resilience will give you the ability to bounce back and self-advocacy, you will

discover, does not mean making excuses but taking responsibility for your actions and learning as much as you can about yourself.(that's where the quiet time you experience will really help you).

In a few moments you will be welcomed into the St. John's Alumni Association, a relatively exclusive group of graduates. Then you will meet outside this tent, form a circle, toss your mortarboards into the sky, accept congratulations from faculty and family and then leave these beautiful grounds of this wonderful school. You will then be on the path to becoming good college students and good prep alumni; wait, don't be good students or alumni, be great ones. Then go on to be great partners, great friends, great spouses, great parents, great caregivers. Welcome these roles with all your heart and know that you may never be recognized in giant headlines or millions of followers on Instagram, but you will be recognized by those whom you love and those who love you, and that's the audience that really counts. Welcome the real greatness that awaits you. And, on this wonderful and lifelong adventure of becoming who you are meant to be that awaits you, I wish you Godspeed, class of 2019.