

# **GRADUATION HOMILY NOTES: THE CONTRASTING VOICES OF ADVENTURE & MEDIOCRITY**

## **I. LIFE IS AN ADVENTURE**

1. After many years of youth work, I've concluded that there are two voices resounding deep within the human person. The first voice is what I call the 'voice of adventure': the lure of exciting enterprises, sometimes risky, always uncertain. (I'll talk about the 'second voice' later on).

2. Adventure in its Latin root means "things about to come, things about to happen". As human beings, but especially as young persons, we are drawn to the adventurous, the risky, the exciting, the challenging.

3. I have identified many different areas of adventure. Let me enumerate some of them for you:

a) the adventure of study and learning: science, technology, history, mathematics, philosophy, etc. Like the explorers of old, crossing the seven seas and mapping the continents of the globe, a serious student explores learning and knowledge: first, walking in the footsteps of those who have preceded; then, striking out on one's own, exploring the new frontiers of science and other human disciplines of learning.

b) the adventure of sports, athletic competition, and physical fitness. (Anecdote of rowing in college: the discovery of synchronization & teamwork, the discovery of the second wind - a spiritual experience)

c) the adventure of love: falling in love, marrying, having children, and raising them: what a roller coaster adventure!

d) the adventure of travel, of entering into foreign countries and cultures, learning new languages and customs, etc.

e) the adventure of work: not just working for money but to develop oneself, to learn in a practical (as opposed to a theoretical) way, developing new skills, etc., acquiring a new self-discipline, experiencing the (good) pride and satisfaction of a job well done, learning humility and obedience by being subject to a boss; learning how to communicate and get along with a whole new world of people, perhaps quite different from what you've experienced up to that point.

f) the adventure of holiness, heroic virtue, loving God with your whole heart, soul, mind and strength.

g) the adventure of winning others for Christ and his Church.

## **II. THE VOICE OF MEDIOCRITY**

1. Along side the voice within us calling us to high adventure, I have identified inside everyone another voice -sometimes a very loud voice- that I call "the voice of mediocrity". This voice doesn't lure, it lulls! saying: "Why bother?" "You can't do this thing anyway". "This is too difficult" "This isn't worth all the effort". "Just get by with the minimum effort; look at everyone else; that's all they do: just get by."
2. This voice presents a serious challenge to us all. (Anecdote of conversation with a high school senior whose life ambition was to get a secure job with the telephone company -through a family connection!).
3. I'm not going to paint a complete picture of mediocrity. I'll let you use your own imagination and probably your own experience thus far in your life.

## **III. THE CHALLENGE OF GRADUATION**

1. So what does all this have to do with you and your Graduation? EVERYTHING!
2. Let me explain. The word "graduation" comes from the Latin word "gradus" : step or degree (as in measurement). To graduate means to climb up one more step, to achieve one more measured degree, hence to pass from one stage of experience to another. Another term for graduation -more in use for college graduation- is the word "commencement", which comes into English from the French after the Norman Conquest and originally derived from the Latin "communitiare". It means simply "beginning". Interesting, isn't it? Both words -graduation and commencement- do not express an end of a stage but the beginning of a new stage.

a) I think it is significant that your graduation begins with the celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the Mass, during which the bread and wine -symbolizing the work of our human hands- is placed before the Holy Spirit whom we expressly invoke to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of our Blessed Lord. For today you are that Bread and Wine, a finished product of human labor -yours and your teachers and mentors- here at St. Augustine Academy. During the Eucharistic Prayer I will place you before the Holy Spirit and ask him to convert you into something greater, to transform each one of you into another Christ, as he, the Holy Spirit, transformed the first disciples of our Lord.

Recall for a moment that first Pentecost, when the twelve apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Who were these men? What were they like? They were very imperfect, they had many defects, they fought among themselves and jockeyed for position, they abandoned Jesus on Holy Thursday night and Good Friday (except for John), Peter denied him three times. But they were ready and willing to change, and change they did, when the Holy Spirit entered into them and filled them with his gifts.

b) They changed from dwarfs to giants. They went from mediocrity to greatness of soul. They were transformed. The Holy Spirit put fire in their belly. They were filled with a great desire to conquer a world for God, to lay a world at the feet of Jesus Christ, ready to go to the

ends of the earth to accomplish their mission, ready to lay down their lives for love of God and men.

c) In a word, they stilled the voice of mediocrity and heard only the voice of adventure. They launched forward and threw themselves into the greatest adventure of human history: bringing Jesus Christ to others.

3. When you receive Our Lord today in Holy Communion, you too will receive the same gift which the apostles received two thousand years ago. If you are willing, you too can be transformed into an apostle, an evangelizer, an authentic witness to Jesus Christ in your world: the world of school and study, the world of sports and competition, the world of friendship and love, the world of work and social life.

4. I think this is what your Graduation is all about: God coming to you and saying, 'If you are willing, I will send you forth on the greatest adventure of your whole life, an adventure which will encompass and include all the other great human adventures that attract you, an adventure of faith, hope, and love, an adventure of faithfulness to my Son, Jesus, an adventure of leading others around you to me.'

5. Is this a risky adventure? Yes, it is. Is it easy? No, it is not. Can you do it? Most certainly you can! Is it a worthwhile adventure? Absolutely!

6. What do we need to do to live out this great adventure of faith, hope and love?

a) first, remain in the Catholic Church, no matter what.

b) second, faithfully attend Sunday Mass and, if you can, weekday Mass.

c) third, periodically receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

d) fourth, read the Bible, especially the New Testament, in particular the four Gospels.

e) fifth, pray every day, at least a little in the morning upon rising and at nighttime.

f) sixth, stay close to the Blessed Mother. Be very Marian and you will never go astray.

g) seventh, associate with like-minded Catholics.

7. Pope John Paul II on January 6, 2001 closed the great Jubilee Year 2000 with a letter he wrote to the whole world, entitled "The Arrival of the Second Millennium". In this letter he chose as theme the words of Jesus to Peter and the other apostles at the moment of the miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee: "Launch forth into the deep". I can think of no better words to say to you about to receive your high school diploma: launch forth into the great adventure of your youth, the great adventure of faith, hope and love of God, the great adventure of being Christ unto others by your word and your example.