

Graduation 2007 Address: Tim Bleecker

I like traditions, and I like ties, so having referred to my tie last year I thought I might try to keep up the tradition this year as well. This tie, given to me by Dr. Cori Cressman, has Philippians 4:8 on it: “Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” That in itself could serve as my whole address. Although we honor you today for your achievements, the degree is actually only a small part. What really counts is how you have grown in mind and heart these past several years. How have you grown in truth, in honor, in purity and loveliness, in your commitment to what is just and praiseworthy? In many ways, what it took to get here today is more important than the destination.

Several years ago two of our friends invited us to a celebration at which they would reaffirm their wedding vows. My wife was late getting ready, and I got us semi-lost on the way there, at which point I got extremely, embarrassingly angry. (Emma Sneiderman loves to recall the time I slammed a stapler down to get the attention of my Latin class, but this was far beyond that.) I had been trying hard to lose a reputation for being late, and this was going to ruin it. Everyone would see us slinking in late. But in retrospect, being on time and my reputation weren’t really what mattered. The ceremony wasn’t about me. What really counted then, at the moment of stress, was my reaction and how my faith in God worked itself out.

Even though this is **your** graduation, it’s not primarily about you, either. Nor is it about Caritas. It’s about the kingdom of God, and it’s about Jesus. We joke that Jesus is the answer to all Sunday School questions, but He really **is** central. Without Him, why be a Christian rather than belong to any other religion?

At the end of each year I’m tempted to ask myself, “Are we succeeding? Is there still a point to Caritas’s existence?” We don’t always succeed. True success, to me, would look like each student saying to him or herself each day, “I’m excited about learning and growing because I want to please God and I want to be more like Jesus.” **That** would make for a community to amaze, astonish, and attract others.

We’re not there yet—any of us. But what joys we’ve had along the way! God is gracious to us in our weaknesses, our imperfect motivations, and our failures. After all, that’s what Caritas is all about: “Caritas is patient and kind; caritas does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Caritas bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Yes, the word used for “love” in the Latin translation of I Corinthians 13 is “caritas.”

It’s not hard to love you seven right now. We’ve been through a lot together, nearly all of it good. And now, as you go off, I have a few brief words to say to each of you.

Stevie – the Lord of the Skateboard, the Caliph of California.

With you, Selby, and Heidi moving on, the last of the original Caritas students are graduating. Despite going through some awkward hair phases, you’ve had three key roles in drama productions here: the mischievous Laurie in *Little Women*, the goofy Bingley in *Pride & Prejudice*, and the hot-

headed son Damis in *Tartuffe*. Though your heart has been in California all year, your mind has been half dozing in the corner of my English & History classes. I'm so glad you were finally able to go on a spring trip this year.

I wish for you many good hair years, good Christian friends in California, and the courage to live for Christ in college.

Selby – the Pasha of Fashion, the Countess of Coiffures.

You've been a part of Caritas since the beginning, first as a 7th grader in Art and in the home-school science lab. Who could forget the picture of cute little Selby in enormous safety goggles that adorned our brochure for years? I remember you as the lovely Meg in *Little Women* and the Paris Hiltonesque Lydia in *Pride & Prejudice*. You've been an excellent Spanish student, and you've brought a lot of style—and good hair—to the girls of Caritas.

I wish for you what I know you desire for yourself—that as you grow older you will grow in inner beauty, becoming more and more like Christ.

Trevor – The Pontiff of Puns, the Doyen of Disagreement.

Two years is a regrettably short time to have experienced you, although you were never shy about giving us a full dose of Trevor. You came in as an authority on everything, and used to interrupt me frequently, though we quickly got the whole etiquette thing ironed out. You've always seemed like a grown up, even when you sold me a book at a home-school conference in 6th grade and came to an open house the next year. I remember one of the students saying, "That kid is only in 7th grade and he has facial hair!"

You've been a superb actor and a gentle man. May you never lose your courtliness, your generosity, and your insatiable desire to learn; and may you make it to the top of Mt. Monadnock some day.

Dawn – The Queen of Quietude, the Countess of Cardgames

I'm so impressed that you've persevered for four years, through good times and bad times. Somehow you've managed to avoid being in any plays. You've gamely endured many speeches and debates, though, and you've excelled at presentations. You've never pretended that academics is your top priority, but you've quietly and conscientiously done your work, and you're going out with a fine last year. I'm proud of you.

May you find the perfect career for your gentle, generous nature, and may you make friends who will inspire you to desire Christ.

Heidi – The Empress of Effort, The Priestess of Pertness

You've been at Caritas for six years, since the beginning. To me you will always be, in part, my little Anne, since we were in *Anne of Green Gables* together. Your performance of Helen Keller was a revelation. It showed a side of you I'd never seen, though I had known, since you were in my Great Books Home School class in 7th grade, that you were feisty and determined. Many people have beleaguered me after tests, but no one has ever been quite so aggressive before them.

I wish for you that you will always keep your love for your family, your desire to serve God, and your feistiness.

Jen – The Princess of Piety, the Saint of Sweet

I love your enthusiasm for those Portuguese explorers, your, um, exploratory spelling, the way you sing out fearlessly in chapel, your good effort at everything, and the way you stepped outside of yourself and your usual shy, pretty characters to play a crabby old woman in the play this year. You've always been a good sport, not to mention a fierce soccer player.

I wish for you that you will always have friends near who appreciate your kindness, that you will keep your devotion to God and your family, and that you will never become a crabby old woman.

Bonnie – our Votary of Vocabulary, our Ingenue of the Haiku.

Most people here, when they think of you, think of laughter. But I, well, okay, I think of laughter too. To my deep regret I've never seen you play the accordion or roast a wiener, but you've still blessed me with much hilarity these past three years. I can't compete with your haikus, especially the famous mermaid one, but I wrote one for you anyway:

Hearing seagull cries
I wrongly thought of mermaids.
Bonnie was laughing

You were a good sport playing Aunt March in *Little Women* and marrying Mr. Collins in *Pride & Prejudice*.

May you always keep your sense of humor, your love of history, and your close friends.

I said before that it's all about Jesus, and each of you knows that's true. He will either be a cornerstone or a stumbling block to every person on earth. May He always be your foundation. Whom else will you turn to when you're still struggling to write a paper and the sun is coming up? (Or you're trying to finish writing a graduation speech and the electricity suddenly goes off?) When friends graduate or move away? When life seems pale, painful, or meaningless? Whom else can we always count on in earth or heaven? God bless you, my friends, every one.