

Graduation Speech 2008

Before we sing our first hymn, I want to thank all the teachers and staff for their hard work, their compassion, their motivation, and their good senses of humor. I have enjoyed working with them immensely, and it is one of my sad duties each year to say good-bye to those who are leaving. Jonathan Newton has been our Physics teacher this year, and we've been awfully grateful to him for teaching, as an unpaid volunteer, first thing in the morning before running off to his job at Intel. We're so glad that being a Caritas teacher this year gave him the self-confidence and courage to ask his girlfriend to marry him. Rev. Kevin Crispell has been our Music Appreciation teacher for two years now, sneaking off from his job as pastor of Elmwood Chapel in Wellesley to make all kinds of music fun, but his daughter Caitlin is graduating today. Reneé Little, who taught math for a second year at Caritas, is leaving for a non-teaching job with enhanced pecuniary emoluments.. And Kate Shaffer, also completing her second year here, will be leaving to pursue theatrical opportunities, including making more of her wonderful costumes.

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HEADMASTERLY REMARKS —

I have only one main point I want to make today: *carpe diem pro Deo*. Seize the day for God. You five have so much going for you: parents who love you, a solid education, incredible comforts and endless entertainment possibilities. You should have gratitude and confidence; you should have hope; you should have passion for life. But above and beyond and behind all that, I am praying that you will have Jesus Christ, God incarnate, supporting you and spurring you on. Because without him all is vanity, in two senses of the word. It's futile and it's self-centered. (I'd like to say it's also a bathroom cabinet with a sink, but I can't quite make that meaning of the word work.) You seniors know from reading *Lilith*, by George MacDonald, this year, that Mr. Vane had to die to himself before he could accomplish anything worthwhile. Living for God and not for self, though, the daily toil of life is meant to be sweet. As Ecclesiastes 3:

11-13 says, God “has made everything beautiful in its time. . . . I perceived that there is nothing better for [men] than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God’s gift to man.”

I want to urge you not to see your school days (and I’m speaking to all of you returning students, too) as preparation for real life. Every moment of your life is real life. The hours you spend in classes, doing homework, talking with friends, or sitting around the table with your family are at least as real as days spent in an office earning money. If you are always looking ahead to “real life,” you’ll miss a lot of it. Only a few days ago my eldest son was a little guy using me as a beanstalk to climb and wanting to snuggle. Now he’s about to turn 13 and wanting to know if he’ll get a Teenager Bonus so he can buy a computer. Don’t let life rush past you while you look ahead to making the big bucks, having a spouse, children, and a house, or you’ll be disappointed. *Carpe diem.*

Consider just a few people you’ve heard of who achieved great things. Julius Caesar transformed Rome, yet he only ruled four and a half years; Joan of Arc’s whole career as a heroine lasted only two years; and John Keats, who wrote some of the most beautiful poems in the English language, died at age 25. Jesus himself had a public ministry of only three years. So don’t put off your real life, and don’t put off living for God. Now is the time; wherever you are is the place.

Our brief time together is all but up, and I have a few words with which to leave you.

Sammi — the Countess of Comedy, the Secret Salsa Dancer.

After your sidekick Bonnie (who gave me this handmade Swedish tie) graduated, some of us wondered how you would endure, but you have had a senior year that is in all ways admirable. In fact, you seem to have saved your best year for last. Even if it’s true that you only won the Roland Award and got straight A’s to avoid having to take exams as a senior, it still required perseverance and hard work. I think this year was also your best performance in a play; you were dependable and always fun to work with. In your understated, ironic way, you

often made me laugh with your journal entries and essays. You made me laugh when you played soccer, too, but that's another matter.

May you always keep your sense of humor, may you realize how much talent God has given you and set your aspirations high, and may you never get caught by the NAPA truck.

Caitlin — the Jean Pierre Rampal of Caritas, the High Priestess of Presentations.

Your flute has graced many a Caritas event, and you've partnered with such notables as Maddie Gibbons and Mrs. Vigneaux. In drama, you were brilliant in comedic roles in *Pride and Prejudice* (as the mother) and *Tartuffe* (as the saucy maid). You've also lent your lovely voice to the Chorus, you started the filmmaking club last year, and who can forget your song about Sigmund Freud? I appreciate the way you reached out to some of the younger students. This has been a difficult year for you, but here you are, having hung on till the end, with a chance to start fresh.

May you find good friends and good influences at Eastern Nazarene College, and may you do the work that God gives you with joy and contentment.

Robert — the Sultan of Soccer, winner of the Most Frequent Visitor to the Boys' Room Award.

Thankfully, your visits to the dumpster were less frequent. You are the only student who ever made me fear. When you would weave your way past an entire team of defenders in indoor soccer and come toward me, masquerading as a goalie, and aim that awe-inspiring kick at me, then I used to imagine my nose snapping or my spleen rupturing. I'm not sure exactly where my spleen is or what it does, but I'm fond of it. Thank you for never hitting it. I'm glad you found Jason as a friend this year. I imagine he'll be e-mailing you often next year, asking for advice on various matters, like papers, pyrotechnology, and women.

May you work hard, regardless of grades or rewards, keep playing soccer all your life, and find your deepest fulfillment in God.

Bethany Joy — the Duchess of Deadpan; our Linguist, Latinist, and my fellow aficionado of Russian novels.

We didn't always see your middle name in evidence, but when you smiled it lit up the whole school. You were an excellent Mary in *Pride and Prejudice*, and a fine Chorus member in *Murder in the Cathedral*, overcoming your natural reticence and diffidence to delight your public. I think of you sitting quietly in study hall or after lunch, assiduously dispatching your homework, and I've often wished I had as much discipline as you. You've been in ten classes with me during your five years here, but you seem remarkably unscathed.

May you always have time to read great books, may you find something to be passionate about, and may you hold onto the deepest joy that comes in Christ.

Sarah — the Grand Poobah of Persistence, the Empress of Excellence.

I've never known anyone as driven to get A's (no, I mean A+'s) as you. Someday they're going to name the so-called Protestant work ethic after you. Ms. Sneiderman and I have always been able to count on you to learn your lines quickly and thoroughly, ever since you stepped in to take your first play role at Caritas when you arrived in the middle of your eighth grade year. You were a spunky, memorable Elizabeth in *Pride and Prejudice*, and you and Sammi and Emily made the play work this year as narrators. Even when climbing Mt. Monadnock you were indefatigable and determined, as only you and John made it to the top with me last year.

May you go easy on your college professors over test grades, may you keep your energy and drive, and may you direct your great talents toward the kingdom of God.

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Colleges like to call graduation ceremonies commencements, which makes sense. As T. S. Eliot said in "Little Gidding," which you senior doubtless remember reading,

“What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning. / The end is where we start from.” You have an exciting new start before you. Remember, my friends, in all you do to speak the truth in love—or, as the Latin version puts it more sweepingly, “veritatem facientes in caritate,” **do** the truth in love—and you’ll never go far wrong. Eliot goes on to say, “We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.” May all your exploring bring you a deeper appreciation and love for your family, your friends, and your faith. And, of course, you’re always welcome to arrive where you started and visit Caritas. I shall miss you.

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INTRODUCTION OF SARAH SPENCER —

In past years, I’ve gotten the last word at graduation. This was fun for me, but it had the regrettable consequence of leading some people to talk about the school as “my” school. So today we’ll be doing things differently, letting Sarah Spencer speak last. Caritas is her school, and Bethany’s, and Robert’s, and Caitlin’s, and Sammi’s. It is dynamic and organic, constantly being shaped by the teachers, students, parents, board members, and even sometimes the children of the teachers. Lisa Sequeira and I, along with our teacher and board colleagues, provide the structure within which the school lives and thrives, like a plant within a flowerpot, a volleyball game within a court, or sometimes a milkshake within a blender.

Today we thank and bid farewell to five students who have put their roots into Caritas and have blossomed to the delight of us all. It is fitting that we hear last from Sarah, as she joins her brother Zachary and her sister Eliza in the exalted ranks of Caritas graduates. In fact, I see them now, hovering luminously in the back and smiling at her, like Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda. Sarah, it’s all yours. And if your speech isn’t up to par, don’t worry; we can always change things back next year. After all, it’s my school, right?