

Good evening. I want to express my appreciation at your attendance and your support of our graduating class of 2022. Your presence here means so much to them but also to us, the faculty, staff, and monastic community of Mount Michael Benedictine School. I want to thank those that have shared their words with us today, Br. August with his homily and Michael Mullin as valedictorian and representative of the class of 2022. I have just a few comments to make, and I will be directing them, somewhat, to the graduates.

How many of you, and this is certainly for everyone in this room, with a show of hands, how many of you have ever seen a Marvel Studios movie? That is what I thought. A lot of you. It is the highest-grossing film franchise in history. And I think there are close to thirty movies with many more in production. There are also shows shown on the Disney-plus network. Many of these programs have their roots in the comic books produced by the Marvel Comics Company since the early 1960s. Stan Lee, the key author of many of the early Marvel books, along with key artists like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, produced an entire world of these characters and story lines and complex cross-over story lines.

So, within this world of Marvel Studio movies there are a lot of story lines, superhero characters and just plain overarching comic book mythology to keep track of. It can take a lot to get through, enjoy and follow! Though they are all a big favorite in our house. We like seeing some of these characters, that have been in the comic books themselves, transform to the movie screen.

Now, one of the current story-telling devices used by the Marvel Studios is something called the multi-verse.

The multi-verse is a device used to tell these stories that can introduce multiple variations of the characters living in alternate universes. So what might be the Spider-man character in this (made up) world could be a Spider-Gwen, a female Spider-man character, in another universe. This can add complexity, increase the fan base, and introduce more modern sensibilities to what have become, within this comic book world, their historical mythology.

So, picture this, you are an artist or writer wanting to break into the world of comic books. You pitch your idea to the heads of Marvel comics, and they green light your idea. You can take a concept or character in many directions, and it can still fit the mythology of the world because you can just change the world in which it happens. Believe it or not, this simple device was first introduced by DC comics going back into the 1950s. It precedes the Marvel worlds, but it is the same idea. And, for those not familiar with all this stuff, the Marvel Comic book worlds are made up of Spider-Man, Thor, Iron man, Avengers, Black Panther, etc. the DC comic book characters are Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, the Flash, etc.

Ok, what is Dr. Peters talking about?

These devices allow characters and stories to be manipulated and played with. What happens is that many times characters get a do-over. Dead characters may be resurrected. New ideas and concepts can be interjected. A lot can be controlled and changed, and it can all fit. Some purists may argue, but the idea is the same; there are changes that can take place. You can make it all fit because...you are making it up as you go!

Now, that does not work for us. We cannot manipulate time. We cannot enter other worlds. We cannot participate in any type of do-over. It might be fun to watch made-up characters be heroic or

solve world crises. But that is far from the real world. It's all supposed to be fun by the way, but not real.

As fragile as this may sound to all of you, this is the reality. We only have one world. We only have one chance. We only have one life. We only have a certain amount of time. Period. There are no do overs in life! How you spend the precious time you have, and time is the one element that everyone shares on earth, is really, seniors, your decision. Now, I would say, that fundamentally, I can get an idea of what you find important by how you spend your time. How much do you devote to your family? I know many of you, as has happened to myself and my family, that loved ones get taken from us. We may regret that we did not spend more of our time with them. I offer you this seniors, as a challenge; assess how you spend your time now and what your plans are for the future. Wherever you go to school I would ask this of you; get the very most out of it! Think of your time here at Mount Michael! These past four years, I would assume, feel like the fastest time of your life. Well, as you age time will seem like it is going faster. You need to value and use it in the wisest way possible. There are no do overs. There are no other worlds. Your life is not a plot device. Your life is your own!

Because we are a school and have given you a Benedictine education, I would call your attention to the values that we focus on as perfect models to spend your time, to spend your life! You cannot go wrong with community, hospitality, integrity moderation, and service! I guarantee your life will be full and of worth by a commitment to them. I would also have you note that these values have everything to do with relationships. Relationships are the key, the focus, the point! Christianity is a humanitarian religion! It is about the guiding principles of living with people that are at the core of what Jesus Christ laid down for us. Our religion is not about worshiping objects or the sun and stars. It is about living together, in community and forming and fostering relationships.

It is not about other worlds, or about manipulating time or having a do-over. Seniors, graduates, what your greatest power, your greatest superpower is, is the ability to choose how you are going to live your life. You cannot put it on anyone but you. How are you going to spend your time? We, and your families and loved ones-many present today, want you to make it your own and to live life fully. Make the true and right and good choices. You have all that you need to succeed. We are proud of you and cannot wait to see what you will become.

God bless you all, it has been an honor to be a part of your life these past few years. Congratulations on today. It is all just beginning for you.