

Graduation Speech, Class of 2023

Good morning. Thank you all for being here. This is a big day for the graduating class of 2023! I want to thank the parents and families for their constant support of these young men. This class started in the fall of 2019. In March of their freshman year, they found themselves at home and learning remotely for an entire quarter of school. Through a commitment made by our staff, students, and families we were able to get back to as close to normal as possible that next school year. We learned that remote learning is just not the same as in-person. There is so much to be said about having the presence of the teacher and learner together in the same room. There were many articles written, money appropriated and curriculum changes that occurred nationwide to address the loss of learning that was occurring because of the world-wide pandemic. I can say, with some pride, that the support of our staff, students and families kept that from happening here at Mount Michael. I would like to say that we did not miss a beat, but that would not be entirely true. We had families directly impacted by the pandemic, and in fact, the first death recorded in the Omaha area due to COVID-19 was the father of one of our alumni and a very generous friend of Mount Michael.

I, we, are extremely proud of this group of young men. They have done a tremendous job of learning and experiencing Mount Michael over these past four years. However, at this time, I would like to inform them of the things that I have learned over these past four years.

First, putting forth hard work and effort does pay off. While it can be frustrating at times, a solid work ethic, especially in a time where we may see a reduction in that attribute among others, does impact us. The true reward is in a job well done. If you think you have worked hard and did all you could to make it better. You have learned that the process, the integrity of the work, making it your own and following the established rules and patterns, have the greatest reward. Maybe the job was not well done, but it was not due to lack of effort or intent. And taking short cuts leads to a lessening of pride in the job done well. Sometimes we think we are clever by taking short cuts or a means to lessen the work, but the only person that gets hurt by such efforts is you.

Second, seeing things in black and white terms can be negative, and destructive. Just because I see things a certain way does not mean others do. Trying to bend, and break, the world to one's vision and expectations can lead to living a life of not respecting others or their views. It can lead to a life of anger and resentment. It can lead to a life of entitlement and ultimately disappointment. Why, because I have let the environment, and some of the people and systems and properties within it, dictate to me a life response. Truly, to live life fully, the realization is that my worldview, and thus my living of life, comes from within. Things are not black and white, but many different variations of grey. How I work and live within that world ultimately leads to a life fulfilled.

Third, every time you make an important decision, you need to reflect on it. Now, it's truly nice to think about the possible responses or outcomes of your decision before it is made, but you do not always have the luxury of time. But, as the Socratic saying goes, 'the unexamined life is not worth living' does hold up here. If you keep barreling through life and responses, i.e. "we have always done it that way" does not hold up during a pandemic. Moving out of our comfort zones, being flexible, willing to try new solutions, all help with solving new and unique problems. But at the heart of this is the ability to look back and process. You may be solving problems and have better solutions because things have been disrupted. Solutions and decisions made could help you, and the organization, well beyond the current

crisis. And, as a result, you may now have a better means to look at problems with this reflective piece in place.

Fourth, and by no means least, a faith life is important. When group assemblies were reduced, attendance at church services and masses was impacted. Being able to go online helped, but as was true with the remote teaching, it did not have the same impact. Worshiping together helps. But a faith filled life is not limited to experiencing things together. It should be active and reflected on, just as I mentioned in my third point earlier. Having an active faith life means the decisions I make are influenced by that view of the world. And the foundation for it should be internal. But ultimately living out my relationship with God needs to be communal. Christianity is a humanitarian religion. We need interactions with others for it to work. We need to reflect on it and improve and, truly, you should not be passive.

Finally, I would just like to express to our graduates, that our Benedictine values, of community, hospitality, integrity, moderation, and service give you the foundation to success. They encompass the traits that will help you lead a successful and rewarding life. Embrace them. They will be, like a true friend, supportive and helpful to you. Rely on them, for they will not let you down.

I want to wish you all the best. It has been an honor having you attend, and graduate from Mount Michael. I know you will do well as you take these next steps in your life. Do not forget to thank your family for their support of you over these past four years. They will be there to support these next four years and beyond.

God bless. Thank you.