As we come to the close of our four years here at the University of Dallas, our thoughts are occupied by days past and the future that is to come. Each of us has his own memories of fretting over finding someone to sit with in the cafeteria, basking in the glow of a Grecian sunset or agonizing over writing a thesis. Each of us will leave this place with our own special collection of memories that we will cherish forever. Before we leave, however, I want to ask what it is that we have been invited to participate in here at the University of Dallas. Most of us take for granted that UD is somehow different from other schools, but why do we accept this statement so readily?

The most obvious description of UD is that it is a Catholic Liberal Arts University. We have read this many times, but how many times have we really stopped to think about what that means? How does the relationship between Christianity and the Liberal Arts provide the inspiration for the development of a place like our own UD?

In the Aquinas Lecture this past January, Fr. Norris Clarke referred to the human being as a creature endowed with a precarious nature, forever attempting to find a balance between his materiality and immateriality. Our precarious nature is attracted to the myth, for myths appeal to us in ways that pure logic does not, and cannot. We often tell myths in an attempt to understand the complex and changing world in which we live. The myth I would like to share with you is not one of the Greek or Roman myths we studied in Literary Traditions; it is one which I came across in a children's book, and is entitled the Tale of the Three Trees.
The story begins with three tiny trees on a mountaintop discussing their hopes and aspirations. The first tree longs to be a treasure chest and hold the greatest treasure in the world. The second tree yearns to be a strong sailing ship capable of sailing the big blue ocean, while the third hopes never to be cut down so that he might grow to be the tallest tree in the world and point to heaven as a constant reminder of God's presence. During our college years, each of us is also a little tree, chatting with our friends about our hopes and expectations, the plans we've made for the future, and perhaps even, our desire to point others to God. Our pursuit of the natural virtues through the liberal arts has served us well as we attempt to discern which direction we will take in life. On this Mother's Day, I am reminded how fortunate the members of the class of 1995 are that our Mother's gave us into this gift of life, unlike so many who are absent from our class and will be absent from every future class due to the legalization of abortion.

In the myth, the trees' hopes are dashed, however, when three woodsmen cut them down and the first tree is fashioned into an animal's feed box, the second a tiny sailing ship fit only for a lake, and the third a mere pile of lumber. I think that many of us will also have our hopes dashed when we go out into the world and encounter our own woodsmen, and our plans are changed due to occurrences beyond our control. We may become disillusioned, and doubt the importance of the virtues and great thoughts we have encountered on our own hilltop here at UD.
The myth does not end here, however, for as you may have guessed, the first tree is the manger which eventually does hold the greatest treasure in the world, Christ our Savior. The second tree is made strong when He carries the King of Heaven and Earth who calms the seas from inside of him, the little boat. The third tree remains confused, however, for he experiences how cruel reality can be as he is carried through a jeering crowd and has the flesh of a man nailed to his wood. It is not until days later on a Sunday morning that he realizes a transformation has occurred. What is this transformation? that in some mysterious way, God's love has changed everything. Nothing is as it seemed. A baby, and not gold, has become the greatest treasure any box could ever hold, a small fishing boat was strong enough to hold He who is obeyed by the Earth and Sea, and two wooden beams have become the instrument of salvation for the entire human race; a cross now serves as the ultimate reminder of Christ and His boundless love for us.

Though things did not occur as the trees had planned, God had fulfilled their expectations in ways they could never have imagined. What appeared to be failure at first sight, was actually fulfillment when viewed properly in light of God's love. We too, must look for the way in which God has changed everything in our lives, and will continue to do so. We must be conscious of the cross we will be asked to carry and the suffering that will be entailed. The acceptance of this cross will require that we transcend the natural virtues as we participate in God's transformation of our lives.
You may be wondering, however, how any of this symbolizes what UD has given us, or the relationship between the liberal arts and Christianity. I would like to quote Fr. George Rutler who said that

Christianity has made the university a kind of Cana, the little schoolroom of Calvary, where the primitive water of mythical assignation is turned into the wine of historical revelation. The liberal arts are basically the culturation of that process, though it is a difficult one and quite capable of, shall we say, drunken excess.

The unity of the liberal arts and the Christian university is an extraordinary one. It is our Christian understanding which enables us to recognize the transformation of the water of pagan naturalism into the wine of Christian revelation and salvation. When we enter the Catholic university we do not check our reason at the door, but rather, we recognize that Catholicism is the fulfillment of the liberal arts. In our search for truths, we are aware of the One Eternal Truth who is God, even though we sometimes find ourselves on the path to drunken excess. Fr Rutler claims that the right understanding of education is to be found through the liberal arts within the Catholic Culture for it is here that "the arts properly attain their integrity within the same scheme upon which all dutiful life should be intent; knowledge, in other words, is of incomplete service, and becomes very much of a disservice, until it helps the knower to attain his moral status in the order of universal reality."

During our time here at the University of Dallas, many of us have struggled in one way or another with the truths of the liberal arts and with our faith. In essence, we are struggling to find our
place in "the analogy of being", in the "order of universal reality." I suggest to you that the union between Catholicism and the liberal arts is what aids us in doing just that, and is what helps make UD the distinctive university that it is. We have exercised our reason in pursuit of the natural truths which the liberal arts present to us, but we have also learned the importance of love, of transcendence. Some of our best moments here have occurred when we go beyond what reason alone can demonstrate for us, and to put it quite simply, we love.

Fr. Rutler illustrates this point quite magnificently when he refers to the point in the mass at which we lift up our hearts to the Lord. "The priest bids the didactic and synagogic speech of the first part of the Liturgy to yield in tribute to transcendent discourse. Reason is not abandoned, rather, it attains its full place in the analogy of being." Catholicism now becomes the instrument through which we find our place in the universal order. As we stand in preparation for the sacrifice of Calvary, our attitude must be one of love. We can find no reasonable explanation for the suffering we are about to witness, yet we are not inclined to forsake reason, rather, we are called to transcend reason through adoration and love. We become like the little trees as we recognize that God's love changes everything, God's love transcends what our reasons alone can show us. We adore Christ, who is Truth, in the Eucharist. We stand in adoration of He who fulfills what we are searching for through the liberal arts.

Most of us will return to UD some day whether it be a physical
return for our ten year reunion or the recollection of memorable experiences. However you choose to "revisit" UD, I hope that your return will be like Charles' return to Brideshead. That is, when many years have passed, and we return to the place where we struggled with the meaning of love and of life, of education and faith, which for many of us is UD, we will recognize what Charles does as he stands at the chapel door:

Something quite remote from anything the builders intended has come out of their work, and out of the fierce little human tragedy in which I played; something none of us thought about at the time; a small red flame—a beaten-copper lamp of deplorable design, relit before the beaten-copper doors of a tabernacle; the flame which the old knights saw from their tombs, which they saw put out; that flame burns again for other soldiers, far from home, farther, in heart, than Acre or Jerusalem. It could not have been lit but for the builders and the tragedians, and there I found it this morning, burning anew among the old stones.

When we return to UD we must be aware of He who has made this place so real for us, He who has changed everything by suffering and rising from the dead, He who will transform us little trees in ways we cannot possibly comprehend now. Maybe we haven't thought much of the little flame which burns brightly tucked away amidst the trees we see from the Mall, but I hope that in the days to come we will. We will realize that the flame could not have been lit but for we, the tragedians who have played the parts of trees, here on this Irving hilltop. As we leave UD and go our separate ways, I ask you to remember that the flame will continue to burn for us, and for those that will come after us. The flame is a symbol of Christ, who is the fulfillment of all that we search for, and it is a reminder that we must lift up our hearts to the Lord who is
present within the walls of the tabernacle. May God continue to Bless the University of Dallas. Thank you.