COMMENCEMENT
May, 2000
Valedictory

"For the Class of 2000"

Matthew T. Mehan

Almost 250 candidates, undergraduate through doctoral, were graduated at the annual ceremony. Also participating were nine members of the first graduating class in 1960 who were celebrating the 40th anniversary of graduation from the University. Commencement events began with Senior Convocation and included Baccalaureate Mass, The President’s Gala, and Commencement itself. Honorary degrees were presented to Robert H. Dedman, President of Club Corp, Archbishop Giuseppe Pittau, S.J., Secretary, Congregation For Catholic Education, and George Weigel, Senior Fellow, Ethics and Public Policy Center. Mr. Weigel gave the Commencement Address. "The Farewell for the Class of 2000" was given by Matthew T. Mehan.
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Before I begin I would like to recognize a group of people I will be mentioning in my speech. Today is Mother's Day, and I think a round of applause is in order for the women who gave so much of themselves, loving our fathers, loving us, and giving us the formation which has brought us this far.

Seeing all of my fellow students interacting with their mothers over the last few days, I cannot help but notice a number of changes in our graduating class. Posture over all is much better, the number of smokers in my class has decreased considerably, and there has been a sudden drop in the use of colorful metaphors. It is very true that there is nothing so humbling, nor so conducive, to virtue, as the presence of one’s own mother.

We have had four mothers in our life for the last four years: our mother who raised us and cared for our body and soul; Mary, Our Mother in heaven to whom we should dedicate our whole lives in thanks for the gift of her son; Our Mother the Church who has administered the sacraments and formed our souls toward Christ and our alma mater. The University of Dallas is our alma mater – our nourishing mother. Just like our mothers, our alma mater has humbled us and nourished us in our virtuous habits, both intellectual and otherwise.

But how has our alma mater nourished us? By the regimen of the core curriculum and the building up of our moral imagination. Thomas Huxley once wrote, “The most valuable result of all education is to make you do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not.” This university has put us through four years of one of the most specified and demanding curriculum on the planet. We have been forced to take two plus years of general studies required classes. Put another way, this university has revealed to us the tomes of wisdom handed down through the ages. We have been led by the hand by some of the most noble intellects we may ever encounter. Just as we now marvel at our mother’s wisdom, despite our earlier impatience at her household rules, only now do we begin to appreciate the education we were put through at UD.

We have all encountered the classics of Western literature. Stories, art, poems, epics, and tragedies have shown us the truth about ourselves in new and irreplaceable ways. From them, I would offer, we have learned the civic virtues of honor, justice, compassion, and righteous anger. We have learned the human means by which to maintain and develop faith, hope, and charity. We have seen what it is to love and to hate, and the hazards of pursuing both. As Dr. Louise Cowan once said, “The moral imagination can’t be built up just by moral didacticism, just by saying to people ‘be good’. It has to be through that imagination that the person freely comes to accept the way to proceed morally. Stories open the heart for rational assent to what it is we truly believe.” These works have enriched our moral imagination unlike the usually mediocre and often degenerate images placed before us for our daily cultural digestion. Just as a mother tells her children stories and watches what they read in order to invigorate their imagination, so too has our alma mater enriched us.

In disciplining us and building up our moral imagination, our alma mater has prepared us well. We are prepared to ask the deep questions about our culture, about human nature, and about the cosmos. We are prepared to pursue sainthood, wisdom, and excellence. We are prepared to take up the burden of responsibility we now have to bear due to our understanding. This education in turn prepares us to live thoughtful Christian lives in a world that more and more requires discerning minds to spot faulty premises and find new ways to draw souls to the truth.

So we thank our mothers, we thank the Church and we thank our alma mater. All three have helped to make us the men and women who will now cross this stage to receive our degrees. All three have guarded us from error, challenged us to think and act reasonably, asked us to admit we are unwise, and led us to pursue Christ in our life. Our alma mater, like our mother the Church and our mothers in attendance here, has prepared us for graduation, for a good life in service to the church and our fellow man, and ultimately, God willing, a good death. On behalf of the first UD class to enter the brave new world of the 21st century, I thank you.