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.
This is an interesting moment for a professor to stand before you. For you there are no more classes. Done. A few final exams to be weathered, and a straggling paper or two to be corralled. But it is over. This convocation marks the beginning of the end. On such an occasion, what might I be expected to say to you? From your point of view, these are, after all, the professor's last words of instruction. Would you really expect me to tell you how great you are? How much we shall miss you? No, ...you don't expect that. I shall not yield to sentimental approvals and heartfelt farewells.

Perhaps you expect of me some parting words of advice, to fortify you before you enter into the hostile world of postmodern nihilism. Or from another vantage point, shall I favor you with homiletic injunctions against illiberally tilting America toward rightwing meanness? Should I honor my office today by bequeathing to you a vision elevated above the moral landscapes of Oprah, Howard Stern, Rush Limbaugh, and National Public Radio?

No, not from me: no advice of that sort. I do not fear for you. The world today has never been better, never safer. And...it has never been worse, never more treacherous. Here are the facts: There is a preponderance of decency, generosity, and industriousness in our world. Nevertheless, evil is real, and it is a constant presence in human affairs. The faces of good and evil change, and their ration in the world fluctuates a little this way or little that way. This is as it has always been. As I said, I do not fear for you. I trust you will do what is right and will make your mark on the world. And when you falter, as you likely shall - since you are not much different than the rest of us - I trust you will make amends and push forward.

So, if I shall neither flatter you in your achievements nor caution or direct you in your venturing forth, how shall I spend these last words?

My first impulse is to tell you how glad I am to see you go. You don’t belong here any more. And I say it with a dry eye. You know too much, and you have too much capacity. You now know what we

"university lifers" have known for a long time. You have come to see for yourself that the most interesting questions about nature and the human spirit are not problems to be solved, but mysteries that only run deeper the closer you come to them. This insight is a learned ignorance that we now share. In your further march toward wisdom and understanding, you will not need your UD professors at your side. Our time with you is passed. You are now on your own, as it should be. You have gained a capacity for research, for invention, for performance, for reading and writing that is no longer simply incommensurate with that of your professors. For any further increase in knowledge and wisdom you must act independently and train your intelligence not on tests, term papers and senior projects, but on the duties and responsibilities of life - in friendship, marriage, family, the priesthood, the religious life, professional training, career, and citizenship.

It is time for you seniors to go. We professors need the fresh ignorance and the naïve incapacity of the new freshman class that will take your place.

The happy fact is that Sunday after next you will graduate...or at least that is what you think. But it is not really correct to say "you will graduate." The grammar is wrong. To be perfectly correct, you will be graduated. You don’t do it. We faculty do it. We graduate you. We elevate you - by a degree. In this act of graduating you, we recognize in you an acquired capacity in either the liberal arts or in the sciences. The authority that we have exercised as your teachers will no longer distinguish between you and us. On that day, we shall all have our degrees. On that day, we professors have no claim upon you, and you should feel no need of us. For upon graduating you, we recognize you as standing with us. Even if you stand only in a modest, hoodless bachelor’s gown, still you will stand with us.

So, what is this place you are leaving? The University of Dallas is in transition. You are the first graduating class to have matriculated under Msgr. Milam Joseph’s administration. Look around you. There is a wonderful art complex under construction in the midst of trees on the east slope off the main ridge of the campus. Other much needed buildings are on the drawing boards. The campus has never been so green and attractive. The entrepreneurial spirit is savvy practice, and not just theory, in the programming of GSM, our forward-looking Graduate School of Management. The spirit of the University is energized by a capital campaign to raise some 120 million dollars. In its middle age, the University is experiencing a vibrant forward thrust. This bend to the future is good and something beautiful.

Consumed with the advance toward enlargement and recognition, the University under the leadership of its President and Deans will be challenged to observe what might be aptly termed a certain kind of environmentalism. I guess you could say that I now speak as a member of the “Green Party.” In the University, things of great worth thrive in an atmosphere that is quite different from the ethos of a business enterprise. In the life of the mind, vital truths of present interest appear most fully to a community that looks in two directions: toward the past, as much as toward the future. The portrait of prudence that directs a worthy university has those two faces you know from art history. Dame Prudence is two faced. One is the attractive, unblemished face of youth, looking outward, on the poise for action; the other visage shows a wizened elder, crooked nose, oversize ears, squinty eyes, pensively looking across time. A healthy academic environment needs the guiding intelligence captured in both these faces.

Let me spell out just a little what “environmentalism” means in an academic setting. First of all, the atmosphere of a healthy university will be washed in the clean air of freedom. Secondly, the intellectual soil that sustains truth in all its diversity will be rich with the humus of the ages. John Paul II recently wrote that “Truth and freedom either go together hand in hand, or together they perish in misery.” The freedom here is the freedom from the domination of fashion. It is freedom to resist compromising principle for the sake of status. It is the freedom that cannot be embarrassed by reasoned reflection on, and
scholarly publication of, ideas that offend public orthodoxies or challenge people’s life styles. Most essentially, academic freedom is the capacity to seek the truth for its own sake, without respect for the interests of power, convenience, or status.

A worthy university teaches one to catch the truth in the fresh waves of the future. It also teaches one to discern the truth in the darkening shadows of the past. Now, what does all this have to do with you? I think your education has given you the capacity for beholding the truth - what little of it we catch sight of - and saying with St. Augustine, "O Beauty so ancient, so new." This is part of the heritage you will take with you.

Such a precious heritage is fragile. It will be hard for you to hold onto it. It will be hard for us at the University to hold on to it. Such a heritage is also rare. Not all universities pass it on. You have been given the elements of an education that are at once precious, rare, and fragile. It takes courage to hold on to one’s intellectual and spiritual heritage. Let me tell you a simple story that illustrates my point.

This is a true story told to me by a house visitor, an enumerator, for the U.S. Census. She was visiting an old man, recently immigrated from Central America. The man spoke no English, so his 18 year-old grandson translated. When asked to declare his race, the old gentleman went into a long discourse, reaching back into the memory of his country and people. Translating his answer to the race question, the grandson said, "He says he’s blanca." "Ask him again," the census lady said, "for I am sure I heard him say mixed and Indian and Mayan and Spanish." The old man solemnly explained again, - and this time the lady clearly understood how his ancestors go way back and are Mayan Indians but that his blood is mixed and he is also very Spanish. The young man again reported: "He says he is white." What is the point of this story?

It is a parable of the fragility of our hold on the Truth, the Beauty that is so ancient and so new. The new generation, represented by the young man, anxious for acceptance and assimilation, is embarrassed by the dark skin and ancient pieties of his grandfather’s heritage. The youth, of course, is right to make his life in the present and to look for assimilation that promises success for him. But he is wrong not to likewise seek out the opportunities in the wisdom of his grandfather’s heritage. And he is doubly wrong to be embarrassed by low status that conventional opinion accords his grandfather’s noble heritage. The parable applies to the University of Dallas today every bit as much as to any of our graduates.

Courage is needed. Our society will progress, for the future will never cease rushing in upon us. What is at issue is how much of our heritage we shall bring forward to guide and instruct us. History recollects numerous instances of the sacrifice and courage of men and women who sought a culture in harmony with the Truth that is both so ancient and so new. One example will do for us. In 1870’s in the Northwest there was a tribe of Native Americans we call the Nez Perce. They called themselves the Nimipu, which means "the Real People." In those years the tribe and its ways of life were hard pressed by the last phases of the Western Expansion. The chief of the Nimipu was a remarkable man named Joseph. The poet finds Chief Joseph at the end of his life, sitting before a campfire, musing at the stars above him, and thinking of his many ancestors and companions who had given the last full measure of devotion to the Real People. He was consoled by the realization that they now slept on "the sweetest of pillows - the knowledge / Of what it is to be brave in (their) own time."

Go. Be graduated. And if anyone asks, you can say, "I was graduated from the University of Dallas in the Jubilee Year of 2000. I found it a worthy University." And in the background I hope you will hear strains of musing echoing: "O Beauty so ancient, so new," "Truth and freedom...go together hand in hand," " the sweetest of pillows - the knowledge / Of what it is to be brave in your own time."

God bless us all.