Provost Sanford, Deans, Faculty, and Graduating Seniors of the Class of 2018,

Congratulations, we made it! Just kidding, we still have to pass finals. But the end is in sight. It’ll be here soon, hopefully before Tom Hand has the chance to break his clean streak with the law. (You’re almost there Tom!) Or before another Old Mill apartment’s entire plumbing system breaks down. One piece of wisdom that I can confidently say every UD student walks away with on graduation day is that being a paying tenant of an apartment does not guarantee you access to a functioning bathroom. Hang in there, guys! Our living situation can only improve from here. (Unless you never leave Old Mill, in which case you’ve wasted your degree). If you live in the condos, then this doesn’t apply to you. You may have a functioning bathroom, but you have less character.

I wish I could single out every one of you by name and tell some meaningful story about you, which I’m sure you’d love to sit through and which I’m sure there’d be plenty of time to do (we are a small class, after all) but sadly I can’t say I know each and every one of you by name. But I could probably tell you the exact location where I’ll pass you on the mall at 11:53 on a Friday afternoon. The most valuable social skill I’ve learned from my time at UD is how not to be awkward when you finally introduce yourself to the person you’ve seen 3 times a day, every day, for the past 4 years but have never spoken a word to. Who am I kidding, it’s still always awkward.

But since I can’t tell stories about each of you, I’ll just tell one about myself which you’ll all have to sit through. It does involve one of the traditions which we love so much about UD,
however. It takes place...on Groundhog. Just kidding, it’s not that kind of story. It takes place on Easter morning. If you’ve ever stayed for Easter you know that there’s a tradition of attending the Easter vigil mass at Cistercian and then staying up all night to watch the sunrise from the University of Dallas sign that faces towards the Dallas skyline. Yes, it sounds idyllic, the perfect way to greet the day on the morning of Our Lord’s Resurrection. My roommate, Theresa Guin, and I were all for it this year. We came out of the vigil mass overflowing with joy and eager anticipation to greet the sunrise. We conversed to our heart’s content, argued with people about whether or not English majors are the most dramatic and annoying students, and had a wonderful time. Unfortunately, our fellow Old Mill residents were not as enthusiastic about the joy of Easter, and by 6 am we had no place left to congregate with still an hour till sunrise. So, we decided to drive the 30 feet to the sign early (because we’re lazy) and to take a little nap in the car. We had a couple other friends with us, so we were fairly confident that at least one of us would wake up before the sun did. However, when I finally did wake up, the sun was already up, the sign was deserted, and the two other friends were long gone. Sadly, they had left us in the car asleep where we peacefully napped while 10 feet in front of us our last chance to celebrate one of our favorite UD traditions simply passed us by. I only learned later from my little sister, who is a freshman and who made it till sunrise, that one of those friends who had abandoned us in the car had subsequently proceeded to tell that little sister: (and I quote) “You can hold this over your sister forever! The freshman has more stamina than the senior!” and to leave out the part that I was there, just 10 feet away, hidden in the back seat of the car where I slept, unaware of all the respect I was losing in the eyes of my little freshman sister.
Whether you participate in all the many traditions of this school or not, I’m sure there are many which you each have your own stories about and which you will each miss. I will miss as well all the little routines that have become so much a part of daily life at UD: stopping in the adoration chapel to say goodnight to the Blessed Sacrament after a long night of studying (and never finding it empty); standing on the mall outside of Haggar after class and getting in your secondhand smoke of the day; feeling shame after picking up your third package of the week from the same student worker in the mail room and realizing that they’re fully aware you have an online shopping addiction; opening up your Old Mill mailbox to find your fourth eviction notice of the month (this doesn’t apply to me); overhearing a conversation in the cap bar about a class or about some interesting topic and wanting to join in but realizing how incredibly creepy that would be; trying to get to confession on a Monday after a “big” weekend and finding that the line goes out the door; being in an argument with a friend and then realizing half way through that you literally don’t disagree on any major issues, you just like talking passionately about what you both already agree upon. The list goes on.

There are so many things that we do and that happen every day, things we don’t think twice about because they’re so much a part of our daily lives, but that no one who didn’t go to UD would understand or appreciate. All of these little things, all of the familiar faces we know so well, even if we can’t put a name to a face, make our class and make UD the intimate, familiar community that it is. I realized very quickly freshman year that even though I didn’t know anyone before I came to UD, basically any person I met would be a person worth being friends with. UD is a place that quickly becomes like a second home, which makes leaving it all the more difficult.
But leave it we must (unless you never went to class and aren’t graduating). All of us chose to come to UD and to graduate from UD for a specific reason, and whatever that reason may be, our choice has made us responsible for carrying out the mission which our university has entrusted to us: to be men and women of faith in the world. That may sound simple, but in the world in which we live, being a man or woman of faith will often require that we be soldiers of Christ. It will often require that we get beat up a little more for stating our beliefs than we get beat up for it now. It will require that we be willing to suffer, and that we let that suffering increase our capacity to love. Perhaps not many of us will become world-famous celebrities (excluding Andrew Lane who will be a world-famous rock star and Sam Pate who will be a world-famous movie star), but I think and I hope that we will all become tremendous lovers, of life and of God, a calling which our education at the University of Dallas has certainly prepared us for. We will be soldiers of Christ by our love. We have been armored with knowledge of the truth and with a desire to pursue wisdom and virtue, which our education at UD has given us, and we have learned how to live those truths and virtues in our friendships. Our possession of these blessings leaves us with little room for fear. But if we are ever greatly wounded, our faith has provided us with the hope that no matter how weak we are, no matter how far we fall, when we return to God, especially in the Sacraments, we will be healed.

My Grandad once told me that when you examine your conscience, something you often forget, but which must be remembered, is the amount of times in your daily life when you are ungrateful, when you forget to say thank you. We have been given so many gifts, and yet I always forget that they are gifts. This university is a gift, and it is a privilege to be graduating
from it. Our professors are gifts. I may not know all my classmates’ names, but they certainly do. The opportunities which we have had to be so closely and personally guided by our professors are privileges that not all university students have. The attention and guidance which we have received from them is reason enough to go to UD. Finally, our friends are gifts, and I think we can all agree that we have been abundantly blessed in that regard. As much as I have learned in my classes at UD, and I have learned a lot, I have learned the most from my friends, from all of you who, no matter how closely we know each other or how much time we have spent together during these past four years, I will always share so much in common with simply because we graduated from the University of Dallas together. Thank you for your examples of how to pursue wisdom and virtue, of how to witness to Christ, and of how to love your friends well. It has been a joy to study with you, to travel with you, to pass you on the mall every day, to room with you, and to get to know you these past four years and it will be an honor to graduate with you. Thank you.