Good afternoon, class of 2013, friends, long-suffering professors. It’s a joy to be here with you all, and it is especially a joy to see everyone clothed in the stately attire of people who spend far too much time poring over far too many books by far too dead people.

When I first came here four years ago, I thought that the Church of the Incarnation, the first Catholic church that, to my knowledge, I had ever entered, was beautiful, and I was glad to find the campus so green, so cozily bent and crooked, and so totally lovely. I have since been assured by many and reputable members of this class that mine is an aesthetic not in line with the high standards of Western civilization. We were always an opinionated bunch, and we’ve spent four years becoming still more so.

In these four years we have spent together, we have seen many changes come to our class, and to our beloved University. We studied the fall of the Trojan walls and observed the implosive fall of Texas Stadium. In those days, girls still lived in Catherine Hall—very, very quietly, it is true, but they did. Back then, they still hadn’t given the New Hall a proper name. Back then, it was still new.

We’ve not been idle since those idyllic days when an “all-nighter” was a night of sleep and a ten-page essay constituted a ten-week labor of love. Many of us, members of the All-or-Nothing, Blessed, or other Rome classes, put on new shoes to walk on Roman streets that have seen the toes of centuries and waited in vain for countless Cotral buses that came late or not at all. We’ve sat up talking early into very many mornings. Many of us got engaged. I earnestly tried. Some of us have published work, which we have taken great care not to allow anybody else to forget. We built and re-built jails and we surely all donated to the Senior Gift… We’ve put on great plays and we’ve put off a shocking amount of actually necessary work.

In many ways, we’re a motley crew of pretty typical UD students, which is to say that we are atypical of typical students elsewhere. When members of the class of 2013 gather, the Lord of the Rings is more a topic of serious discussion than among other inhabitants of the continental United States. We have, as is the UD wont, a gigantic love for the professors who share their subjects and their lives us, and who inspire us to live in a way that is greater, more brilliant, more human. Our art majors, like all UD art majors, are shrouded in mystery that has been enhanced rather than eliminated by the beautiful art that recently materialized all across campus.

We have many of the same “sorts” of people as the classes above and below us do, if any person living can be reduced to a “sort” or a “type.” What I love about our senior class, however, is that we largely seem to refuse such reduction. This is a Catholic University for Independent Thinkers. The class of 2013 is filled with independent thinkers. We have opinionated, prosing revolutionaries among us, and we have silent optimists. We have punster seminarians and polyphony-singing rugby players. We have those whose gusto for life transcends walls, filling the campus and neighboring provinces with the noise and music of their jubilance. We have among us here mystic poets, future homemakers, grand satirists, silent stargazers, and caffeine addicts.
What I really like best about us, of course, is that to consider any of those descriptions sufficient for even one member of this class is to miss out on all the hidden excellences, the concealed hilarity, and the unparalleled bizarreness of everyone here present. Our class is irreducible, every single member of it. I cannot even in words simplify our class or cancel its kinks.

And I’d never want to. The reason I’ve given the above catalogue of personalities is because I wanted to point out that you cannot have gotten by in our class if you only liked one sort of person. You cannot have gotten by in our class without an earnest desire to grapple with understanding others, with learning to see that even those who disagree with your happy first impressions of a college camps—even those pessimists—are beautiful and are a means to truth and joy. I think, in my ignorance, that the attitude cultivated by such a heterogeneous, colorful, loving class will stand us ever in good stead, even when we have left the bosom of our dear nourishing mother. A brass plaque on the Tower records the Jesuit and poet Gerard Manley Hopkins giving glory to God for “All things counter, original, spare, strange.”

You people are strange. Thomas Nelson offered me one-hundred dollars to stand up here and chirp like a dolphin. I thought about it. I didn’t refuse from any doubt that the ethos of this class would be well expressed by an exuberant aquatic symphony. I refused because, well, I’m a UD student, about to be a UD alumna, I’m reconciled to never seeing a hundred-dollar bill, and because I didn’t want to pass up the opportunity to tell you to your blear-eyed, sleep-deprived and, on the whole, decent-looking faces that you are a wonderful cluster of strange, lovely people, and it has been an honor to spend four years with you. Thank you all, and may God bless us always.