

I am honored to have been chosen to address the McNicholas High School graduation class of 2015, though I am a bit puzzled. Why me? You know this not be a short talk, right? Once the initial joy at having been chosen wore off, I wondered, with all of the experiences I have had with you guys and all of the life-changing advice, earth-shattering opinions and mind-blowing ideas I have offered you over the course of the years, what could I possibly have left to say? Well, our theme for the evening deals with the excitement and the difficulty of moving on. I'm reminded of a story about a guy named Jesus, and (long story short) he had to move away from His earthly family and friends in order to fulfill His destiny. In His divinity, as He knew that He would be missed by those who had come to love Him, He left them a message that would help them to know the peace and joy that they had experienced in His presence after He had gone. He told them, "Love one another." Then He sent them His Holy Spirit to motivate them and remind them of the power of loving one another. That man and His simple challenge and His wonderful Spirit changed the world. And as we watch you go off into the next part of your life, I remind you that investing in the lives of those around you, seeking to meet others' needs as opposed to your own wants and desires, and creating relationships based on a willingness to serve are still the path toward lasting peace, joy, and hope. Because when you do these things, you never leave the lives of those you influence. While your physical presence perhaps moves to some other place, your words, your spirit, and your smile have become a presence in the lives of others. Yes, there will be tears on both sides because we will miss that physical presence, but there will be much more joy at the realization that this person who loves you, who leads you, and who helps you to come a little closer to being the person you were created to be, is truly with you in so many other ways. Both individually and collectively, you have left an indelible mark on the classrooms, on the fields, and in the studios of our school, but also on the people, because you have chosen to lead, to serve, and to sacrifice for one another – you have chosen to love one another, and you have chosen to define "one another" as all of God's children. That is your legacy.

I would like to spend a few minutes talking to a group of people who make all of this possible. With all due respect to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and the administration of the school, I want to thank the parents of the students of the Class of 2015 for allowing me the opportunity to spend some time with your children. On behalf of the school and the community of people who get to work with and be around these young people, I say thank you for helping them with their homework, coaching their teams, reading them stories, attending their performances, and showing them that life is a wonderful gift to be both treasured and shared. The students of McN are intelligent, funny, kind, courageous, mischievous, beautiful, powerful young people. I have enjoyed the chance to coach them, to attend retreats with them, to watch them perform, to pray with them, and most importantly, to harass them in the hallways and lunch room – and every now and then, they gave me the impression that I might have taught them a few things as well.

And I want to say a few things to the graduates about and on behalf of their parents. Your parents (We, if you will) used to be cool – we used to hang out with friends, while away the hours playing games, eat unhealthy foods, go to parties, and spend money indiscriminately – all of the things that you all think you invented. We had cool clothes, we were current on popular culture, we had the latest gizmos and gadgets; and we thought we invented all the cool things we were doing. We were cool and now we are all goofy and it is all because of you – every last one of you. But, don't feel bad: it's not because you are bad people or disappointments in any way – we don't blame you. But, this is how it went – we laid our eyes on you for the first time and we knew immediately that we were going to love you forever and that means we would lose our cool for the foreseeable future; instead we would become food-stained, minivan-driving, Wiggles song-singing shells of our once righteous, bodacious selves. But, that's not what makes us goofy.

As you began to grow up, when we walked into the room, you stopped everything you were doing, ran to us, and jumped in our arms with a hug that washed away the day and a smile that lit up the night. You told us all about your day, you shared your future plans with us, and you came to us for everything that you needed help with. You made us feel like we were important. Then, somewhere along the way, something changed, and when we walked into the room, we got a nod or a “sup”, or perhaps nothing at all. You turned us into a bunch of nerdy, needy, nosey people. But, that’s not what makes us goofy.

Then, you moved into the more recent past of your lives and have sought to become more independent, to do more on your own out of our watchful, loving eyes. Trust me, we want you to be independent – we are tired of telling you what to eat, what to wear, and how to spend your time. But, understand this: when you have asked us to do something that would draw you away from us, we would often tell you NO, but not because we wanted you to be miserable or we wanted to keep you from experiencing all the wonder and beauty that life has to offer; it’s just a lot easier to say NO than to expose our vulnerability by admitting that so much of our lives is out of our control and we are scared when we can’t see you with our own eyes. You may presume to be impervious to the dangers of life all you want, but we know better and you are too valuable to us to take unnecessary risks with your wellbeing or ours. You have robbed us of our confidence, our peace of mind, and, in some small ways, our dignity. But, that’s not what makes us goofy.

Now, before I tell you what does make us goofy, let me tell you what keeps us on this side of sanity. As I said before, we have been through all of this ourselves with our own parents and, from our own experiences, we are hopeful that, at some point, it will come full circle. There will come a point in your adult life when you will realize that we were right there, in your corner, doing the best we could all along – you again will come running to us in your joy and your sorrow, you will again realize that we are the most important people in the world, and you will again NEED us. Then, we can be cool again. It's coming. We will always be your parents; and though we may never be your peers, we can be friends – like the kind that Jesus tells us we should be – people who live for one another, in service to one another, and in support of one another.

And, what indeed makes us goofy is, despite all that we have lost and all that we have become because we have devoted our lives to you; despite the sleepless nights, the grumpy mornings, and the busy days that you have given us; and the money, Lord, the money we have spent; we would not change one minute of it because it has brought us to this moment with you, as you are, and we are very proud.

So, here I am telling you of all the benefits of loving one another, I should also tell you that I learned a great deal about the power and beauty of love from the members of this class. This is not an effort to single out any individual or group, but to share through my experiences the ways in which you have led me to being a better teacher, coach, and family man. Any teacher here would have his/her own memories and examples, and if we all had the chance to share those, every student's name would be included I am sure.

At the end of your freshman year, I made the move back to the English Department after a brief stint in Theatre. While many of the facets of that decision were easy to make, the one thing that broke my heart was having to walk away from the freshmen that I had in my last Theatre I class. One of the joys of the last three years was seeing many of you gracing the stage in productions, working diligently behind the scenes, and returning McNicholas Theatre to its rightful place of prominence and dominance at State. I got the pleasure of watching you develop your talents, but more the joy of watching you grow into the leadership roles that you came to assume in the theatre and throughout the campus. For reminding me that creativity is a blessing and not a job, thank you.

During your sophomore year, having returned to English with my pride dented and my spirit sagging, I needed you more than you will ever know. I needed the energy that you all brought to class each day. I needed the challenge of making the work we were doing relevant to your lives. I needed to see the way that you all looked out for and cared about one another. I remember one class when we were explaining our own scarlet letters to the class – problems we saw in ourselves that we wanted to change. One student offered very honestly that he had trouble expressing himself emotionally which made it difficult for him to make friends. At that point, without any prompting from me, the students in the class began to tell this young man all of the great qualities that they had noticed in him. It was one of the most beautiful moments I have ever experienced in teaching. For reminding me that classroom is still the coolest place on earth, thank you.

To the 14 folks who made up my 8<sup>th</sup> period English 4 class this year, I am glad that you did not let all the fancy book-learning interfere with your education in the class. I had a couple of you admit to me outside of class that OEDIPUS, although really strange, was oddly compelling. A couple more admitted that they understand HAMLET better than they thought they would and actually understand even more Hamlet's inability to decide the next step to take in his life. Now, I don't know if it is my storytelling abilities or that fact that even MY life was more interesting than the things we were reading, I have never been asked more times by more different people to tell them a story. What a wonderful feeling to have someone ask you to share your story with them, even if it was just to get me distracted so we wouldn't have time for the vocab quiz. Sometimes I had to say NO because we were in the midst a what I thought was a pretty good story that we were reading; but on some occasions, I would regale them with verses and chapters from the Book of Mulvey: the Husband and Father Years only, for those of you who remember me from earlier parts of the book. In return, I would get to hear some of their stories, again usually more entertaining than the literature. For reminding me of the power of memory and the need to share our stories, thank you.

To the Dirty Baker's Dozen, what are you going to do now? I hope that whatever it is, you will continue your development of Full Stature in Christ by striving to be the best men you can be, being men who are passionate about your faith and beliefs, and taking pride in excellence – that formula has worked out pretty well for you so far – greatest 3-year run in school history. But always remember all the benefits that the formula has had on your life as a student, a son, and a friend. Champions and Children of God are so around the clock, in all they do. You are both. For reminding me that our greatest responsibility is to teach you how to love and to be loved, thank you.

And to the GO-Rillas: Grant, my soldier; Chuck, my buddy; Woody, my one-legged center; Nate, my no-legged guard; Will, my Existentialist; and JFK, my hero; and to my honorary GO-Rillas, Alec and Elliott: I love you guys and I look up to you. I challenged you each day to build trust with your teammates by sacrificing and leading and you rose up every time. You put all of yourselves into the middle of the table every day and said to your teammates, "Let's Ride!" I am so proud of the teammates you have been and proud to be associated with the work we did. For reminding me that Offensive Linemen are the paragon of service, leadership, and, along with Christ, our only hope for world peace, thank you.

Finally, to the ladies of the women's soccer team, I truly appreciate the way you all went about your business this year in capturing the state title. While the talent was apparent, the glue that kept the talent working and together was the leadership of the seniors. How can you not watch Lauren Rice practicing her craft and not be inspired by her work ethic and sacrifice? For me, the best part of the year was dismissing Meghan Martella from 8<sup>th</sup> period five minutes early every day so that she could get treatments from Cathy, the athletic trainer, on her ankles, her knees, her back, her head; then, see her limp her way to the field, bandaged and dragging an IV stand behind her, then stepping on the field at game time a running past, around, and over anyone who got in her way. For reminding me that it takes great teammates to have a great team, I thank all of you.

And if you are someone who I have not gotten to know very well over the years, please know that I thank you as well. You have provided encouragement and motivation to your classmates and have helped them get here as much as any of us has. I respect the work you have done in Nicaragua and Eastern Kentucky and the good you have done for pediatric cancer patients and at the SEM Senior Prom. For reminding me that in the face of a challenge, Rockets don't run, they rise, thank you. And thank you Hutch for letting me steal that line.

So, whether this makes you more or less excited and/or distressed about moving on, I think you have to just except as facts of life that you guys are awesome, you have taken good care of one another while you were here, and the investments that you have made into the lives of your parents, teachers, and friends will continue to pay dividends. And the effects are mutually beneficial. Elliott Higgins and Allie O'Keefe will continue to shape our integrity. Nicole Geyghan and Jacob Kennedy will continue to shape our courage. Michelle Hollenkamp and Eric Frey will continue to shape our spirits. And Will Allgeier will continue to shape our understanding that there is no limit to what a person can do and be. Each of you will continue to shape the lives of those with whom you have shared your life. So, no matter where you go or what you do, you take the love of all of us with you with one instruction: have an extraordinary life and have a positive influence on the world by choosing to continue to love one another. And we will take care of what you have left us by doing the same.

May God continue to bless the graduates, their families, their teachers, and their school, Archbishop McNicholas High School, the greatest place on the earth.