

Graduation 2008 Speech

On behalf of our school, thank you to everyone for being here this evening to celebrate the sixty-sixth commencement exercises of Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School. Bishop Garcia, we are honored to have you with us. Welcome Dr. Kim Pryzbylski, Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Monterey, welcome Reverend Clergy, Members of our school's Board of Regents, and all my wonderful faculty and staff. And welcome to our Golden Diploma recipients – those Mission graduates from the class of 1958 – graduates from fifty years ago – you grace us with your presence here this evening.

But this ceremony is only complete because of our parents and grandparents and families and friends of this graduating class – all of you who have loved your students throughout their 4 years here at MCP, guaranteeing their success. Thank you for the gift of your children to our school community. We have been made better for their presence among us, as well as your own, throughout these last four years. If you are a parent or grandparent of a graduate tonight, please stand and be recognized at this time.

And, of course, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge all of these beautiful graduates who sit before you here in Mission Plaza – all of my dear, young friends in the class of 2008. As a representative of the community of adult educators here at Mission and on behalf of us all, we are honored to be here with you all tonight as you graduate from high school.

This is the conclusion of my first year as the principal of MCP and already I have so many great memories. These students have been so touching to me. A few illustrations: in reaction to my many novice mistakes throughout the year, Joe Mazelin and Macain Weipert referred to me as “the rookie.” I loved it whenever Chris LoJocano bragged about making me one of the famous break-time breakfast burritos. Or when

Julie Rutiz lent me and my 6 year-old daughter her copies of the Harry Potter books. Or playing Ryan Cardinale in ping-pong and then discussing neuro-surgery afterwards, or trying to always get Rachel Woolslayer to smile. Or shooining Joel Dunbar and Kevin Vorhees out of my office CONSTANTLY when they were supposed to be in class. Or Jackie Iaquina shaking her head and just saying in her inimitable way, “oh, Childs!”

Of course, I have many memories too, that are bigger, more characteristic of the class itself. Memories of the rallies, when the senior section always cheered loudest at the direction of Max Belasco. Or gathering around Luke Hetzel after the Homecoming Football Game to sing the *alma mater*. Or on the Kairos retreat, in the several remarkable ways the class came together in and through that experience. And the tremendous senior leadership consistently exercised on behalf of our school with diligence and integrity this year.

I’ve seen these kids *study* and *pray* and *win* and *lose* and *make mistakes* and *share their frustrations* and their *joys* and *work hard* and *care for one another* in a million different ways this year. They are scholars and friends and leaders in ways that are singular and exemplary, setting incredibly high standards for the rest of us.

Graduates, members of the MCP class of 2008, on behalf of your teachers and staff members who have served you throughout your MCP careers, I wish to convey my deepest congratulations. We are very proud of you all – you should feel very proud of your accomplishments -- we love you all very, very much.

When I was a Catholic high school student, I belonged to an organization called the Hunger Abolition Corps. One of our drives included gathering boxes of food and gift certificates from local supermarkets and distributing them to needy families throughout our community. My friend Heidi and I drove into a very shabby

neighborhood, to a dilapidated house where we couldn't believe people actually lived. We knocked on the door and entered with our food into a dark and filthy house. The mother of four small children looked at the food and asked *where the money was*. We have a gift certificate that you can use at the supermarket, we replied. "I was told I was getting money," she forcefully insisted.

We left our box of food and the house without thanks, without recognition, with only an angry glare as she shut the door behind us. We were confused and a little shaken by the experience.

Since that experience in high school, that formative moment of service, I've often reflected on why it is that we serve – what should be our motivation as Christian servants?

Although it might be tempting to want to feel good about ourselves, we do not serve because of the reward we receive in return. It is essential to serve especially when others can't say thank you. When circumstances of brokenness and pain prevent any expression of gratitude. We love and serve one another in response to how much we have been loved by others, by God, sometimes even in spite of ourselves.

It's easiest to find the motivation to serve one another when we're talking about a sick person, or a baby, someone innocent or helpless. But it's much more difficult when we're confronted by a street person who hasn't bathed and whose behavior is erratic. Or maybe someone who is culturally, visibly, different from ourselves. Mother Teresa said that a heart centered in prayer, engaged in faithful service for another, was how we could learn to see the face of Christ in the other. What an intense vision to put forth – that what we do for one another, we do unto Christ. To see Christ in the face of those we serve... and maybe even in some small way to become Christ for another through that service....

The outpouring of gifts by the Holy Spirit in our baptism imparts the distinctive character that *our lives are not our own*. We're gifted for a

purpose – not for ourselves, or our conveniences, but for the building of the reign of God. The greatest gift that we can impart for one another and our students is... *to serve* – to look outside of ourselves in real consideration of the other. This is to collectively and increasingly become a community of real friends where we encourage and enable one another to be better than we could be on our own. To become better than any of us could ever be on our own....

Ultimately, the shape of Christian love is not a heart, or the sweetness of a fuzzy bunny, or a dove in flight, but the shape of Christ's cross. The shape of Christian love is self-sacrifice, pouring out the gifts of our whole lives to make something beautiful for God. We all know the grace and power of getting caught up in something rich and vital and bigger than ourselves. The life of faith, expressed through service to one another, is attractive and graceful and unifying. Whether you've been involved in ASB, or served as a Eucharistic minister at school masses, or participated in Interact, or gone on Esperanza, or played on a team that has given the gift of intense competition, or showed kindness to an underclassmen in need, everything in our life here at Mission is consecrated by our collective care and passion, and made into an offering for the whole... but ultimately, our life here has been in praise of the God who makes us and calls us to be happy in this life and to live forever with him in the life to come.

To be a servant, to become a woman or man for others, to go all the way, is to recognize that: "God does not ask for *help*, he asks for *you*." For *all* of you!

In a favorite book of mine called, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton says, "For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self." Merton's point is that human life has a goal – a destination – we're all not just along for the ride! We have the *opportunity* and the *responsibility* to BECOME something that

we aren't when we start out – to become most fully who God has intended us to be... and that is truly our best and most authentic selves!

Speaking at the Harvard Commencement in 1982, Mother Teresa reflected on the desire that all people, but especially the young, have for wholeness, completion, and happiness – for discovering what is best within themselves. She called that desire a “terrible hunger for God.” And the answer, she posits, that which satisfies the longing, is found in a life of service, rooted in a prayerful heart. To seek an answer for the meaning of our lives is equivalent to pursuing holiness, that ‘end’, or goal, to which we are called as creatures of God. “Holiness is not the luxury of the few,” Mother Teresa pointed out, “it is a simple duty for you and me.” We must love with great energy to become most fully who God calls us to be.

In each moment of our lives, God plants seeds in the soil of our freedom, enabling spontaneity, engagement, and love, indeed discovering God's very Self. We are capable of encountering God in a myriad of ways within every moment of every day of our lives, if we're looking through the right lenses. This is to have a sacramental worldview – to see with God-stained eyes. It is to perceive and realize the profundity of God's presence everywhere in everything. It is how Catholicism teaches us to see – to look... and to act... as a Saint.

This, then, is my prayer for each and every one of you, all of you who graduate tonight from our school – Mission College Preparatory Catholic High School – as you take your next steps into adulthood. My commencement prayer is that you become the Saints that our world needs so much, that you become the Saints that you all *must be* in order to fulfill your biggest dreams.

May God continue to bless this community. Thank you all.