

**ADVICE FROM SAINT AUGUSTINE
COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
SAINT THOMAS OF VILLANOVA COLLEGE, KING CITY, ONTARIO
June 28, 2016**

President Paradiso, Mayor Pellegrini, School Governors, Faculty, Staff, Family, Friends and the Class of 2016 of Villanova College, I am honored to be here and hope that the thoughts I share with you will honor the day and the celebration of this graduation of the Class of 2016 – A Class of Their Own. I bring you the greetings of the other Augustinian Secondary Schools of North America as well as the greetings of the Augustinian Friars of the Provinces of North America. I have no illusions that either I, or this address will be remembered. I only hope that the thoughts I impart to you graduates will be uplifting as you start off into the next phase of your life.

This is a momentous day. When you leave this ceremony in many ways you will never be same. Since you will no longer be secondary school students, you will never be able to come back here as students. As you join the alumni of Villanova College, you are moving out on your life journey. While this may seem daunting know that you are prepared to go on your journey. All that you have accomplished here has prepared you.

Yet as you go out on the journey you enter a troubled and uncertain world. Be assured that you are not alone. Educated here at Villanova College, you have experienced the Augustinian values coming from Saint Augustine. In Saint Augustine you have an example of someone who journeyed out from secondary school into a troubled world. In your formative years you experienced a world of war and economic difficulties. For Saint Augustine, the equivalent was the sack of Rome by the Goths. For him the Goths were not people with a penchant for black clothing and purple dyed hair, like my niece. They were a tribe of barbarians terrorizing all they conquered. As

Augustine lay dying the city he lived in was under siege by the Vandals. They were not a problematic group of destructive teenagers. They were another tribe -- this time terrorizing North Africa.

BUT, like you Saint Augustine was prepared. Yet, he learned from personal experience that the journey is not always easy. His favorite image for such struggles was navigating stormy seas. On his stormy seas Saint Augustine not only used his school preparation, but also often relied on what his parents had given to him. From his father, Patrick, he learned the value of education since Patrick went beyond his means to send Saint Augustine away to school. He also learned Patrick's ambition, passion for success and desire for the cultivated life. From Saint Monica, his mother, he received the gifts of unyielding perseverance and a commitment to love unconditionally. Like Saint Augustine, you bring to your life journey the benefits of the values your parents have imparted to you. Like Saint Augustine, use what they have taught you and continue to rely on their encouragement.

Even though you will always remain your parents' children, today begins the time in which you will be recognized (or not recognized) as a mature individual. The difference is up to you. According to Saint Augustine "To achieve maturity, a human being needs a certain balance among three things: talent, education and experience." (*The City of God*, 11, 25). Even though you are well prepared, it will take work to translate your preparation into a balanced maturity.

As you embark from Villanova College your journey will be filled with new experiences, just as Saint Augustine faced new experiences on his journey to maturity. To reach maturity you will need to achieve a balance among many and varied experiences.

They will be so many and so varied that they can surely overwhelm you. How can you work successfully through these new experiences? Heed the advice of the mature Saint Augustine, “Success cannot be achieved without careful and progressive planning.” (*Soliloquies*, 1, 23). Also in his book, *The Teacher*, Saint Augustine recalls the advice for success he gave to his son, Adeodatus. This is good advice for you. Be self disciplined and take the initiative. Make your life your own. Learn things for their own sake not just because they are required but because knowledge is power. Seek to answer the questions that arise from your experiences. Do not simply settle for the answers others provide. Be inquisitive and have conversations about the important things in life. Do not settle for the world of talk-show sound bites. Even though it is tempting do not just experience a prolonged adolescence, like Saint Augustine transform yourself into a mature individual you can be proud of.

As I noted in addition to experience Saint Augustine sees talent as essential to the balance needed for maturity. Talent is essential because maturity is not becoming someone else. It is becoming the best you that you can be. In his *Soliloquies* wrote a phrase for which he is famous “O God let me know myself, let me know You.” (II, 1, 1) Getting to know yourself -- searching out your talents and putting them to good use will take a lot of work. Even here Saint Augustine has advice for your life’s journey of learning about yourself, “Search in ways that lead to discovery, and discover in ways that you keep on searching.” (*The Trinity* 9,1,1)

But remember Saint Augustine prayed, “O God, let me know myself, let me know you.” He prayed this because he deeply believed that each person is created, as the Book of Genesis (1:20) tells us, “in the image and likeness of God.” For true success it is not

enough to know about yourself. Our talents are a way of knowing about God. They are part of God inscribed in you and me. Through our talents and the talents of others we learn about God. From what we know about God we also learn about possibilities for ourselves that are beyond our imaginings. Do not settle for a university degree and/or a good job. Invest in yourself by learning about and loving God more and more. For Saint Augustine, God is the Inner Teacher challenging us to be the best image of Him that we can be. Saint Augustine had a great education and the best of jobs as spokesperson for the Roman Emperor, but he felt unfilled. It was in listening to God as the Inner Teacher that Saint Augustine found his happiness and true success. In a world that does not value God or sees belief in God as something private, do not shortchange or limit yourself by putting God on the shelf. Seek all the possibilities of happiness and success by including God in your seeking and discovering the best you can be.

In Saint Augustine's definition of maturity education is the third part to be balanced with experience and talent. By getting this far you have shown that you are prepared for the next leg of your life's journey. You have shown that you can amass knowledge, but the trick from now on is to move as Saint Augustine says, "through knowledge to wisdom" (*The Trinity*, XIII, 24). Here at Villanova College you have been schooled in Saint Augustine's ideal of striving to be of "One mind, one heart intent on serving God." (*Rule*, 1) Even though your future education will focus a great deal on the mind, the real key to success in life's journey is having the right heart for wisdom and living well. Even though great things await you, be assured you will face difficulties. In the face of those difficulties use the heart you have prepared to muster the courage to work through them. When you hit stormy seas on your life's journey be guided by Saint

Augustine's advice on the stumbling blocks in learning (*Instructing Beginner's in the Faith* (10,14-13,19)):

When you are tired, muster the courage to find people and experiences that build up a cheerful attitude.

When you are discouraged, muster the courage to find people and experiences that build up your patience.

When you are bored, muster the courage to find people and experiences that bring you excitement.

When you are sad, muster the courage to find people and experiences that give you joy.

When you are unmotivated, muster the courage to find people and experiences that build up your energy.

When you are tense and fearful, muster the courage to find people and experiences that build up your trust.

Here at Villanova College you have not been alone. You have been part of a community. In particular, you have been part of a Class of Your Own. All the important learning events in Saint Augustine's life involved others. As he tells us, "We need the gifts of others to make up for what is lacking in ourselves." (*Commentary on the Psalms*, 125, 13). As you embark on the next phase of your life's journey you will not be going together as a group. You will be joining new and different communities. As in all changes of community you will find new friends. In addition to developing your own gifts and talents, making wise choices in friends is a most important Augustinian value. In the good friendships you have made and will make I hope that you will look back on the next steps in your learning journey as Saint Augustine did on his time in school with friends, when he wrote,

My soul found all sorts of joy when I was in the company of friends — talking and laughing and being kind to each other — reading engaging books together, going from the lightest joking to talking of the deepest things and back again — differing without discord, as I might differ with

myself, and when on the rarest occasion disagreement arose, finding it highlighted the delight of our normal agreement — teaching or learning from each other — being impatient when some were absent and welcoming them with joy when they returned — these and similar things, emanating from our hearts as we gave and received affection, shown in our faces, our voices, our eyes, and a thousand other gratifying ways, ignited a flame which fused us deeply together and made the many of us one. (Confessions, 4, 8, 13).

As someone who has recently experienced a number of class reunions from the various schools I have attended, I hope that as you separate into the next phases of your life, you keep close ties this “Class of Our Own.” As my class reunions have affirmed for me, friends are the best connections to the best times of our lives. Be truly Augustinian and keep valuing the friends you have made.

As you move out prepared to face an uncertain world and on to new communities as well as new friends, I give you the advice Saint Augustine used to conclude his memoir, *The Confessions*. It is the biblical advice, “Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you.” (*Matthew 7:7*) Like Saint Augustine make a path for yourself by having the courage to ask, to seek and to find so that in coming to know yourself and the God whose image you are, you will receive wisdom, you will find happiness and that the best life has to offer will be opened up for you.

My last advice – Go out and celebrate. You have earned it. Congratulations and God’s blessings upon you Villanova College’s Class of 2016 and your family and friends.

Gary N. McCloskey, O.S.A.