

Jamie/Louis Antonelli

University of Dallas
Commencement Exercises
Valedictory Address
May 15, 2005

Bishop Grahmann, Dr. Lazurus, beloved faculty, fellow members of the class of 2005, alumni, family, friends, foes, small animals, trees, and our beloved tower:

I'd like to once again thank the class of 2005 for electing me to represent them, and to reiterate that I am humbled and profoundly tickled to be speaking here today. I gave some advice to my fellow seniors last week at senior convocation, and I hope they all found something practical they can use out there in the real world. I know I learned something; namely to be careful who you poke fun at in convocation speeches.

As I searched desperately this past week for advice about the proper nature of *this* speech, two requirements came resounding back: comedy and brevity. We'll see what happens. I ran through my speech last night and it was actually a little too short. But don't worry, I changed the font to Courier New and slightly widened the margins, so it should work now.

I think we would all agree that since Dr. Lazurus took the helm here at UD, this graduating class has been by far the best in every way. In addition, I'm sure we would all agree that Dr. Lazurus has been, hands down, the best graduation speaker we've had since he started here at UD.

I've thought long and hard about what to say this morning. I searched the depths of my brain for any nuggets of wisdom to share. But, for some reason, everything I found seemed to have to do with physics. Eventually I settled on two concise topics, in order to meet the brevity requirement: where we, as the class of 2005, have come from, and where we are going.

To discover the common background we share as the University of Dallas graduating class of 2005, I started by asking *myself* that question that all my relatives and friends incessantly asked me four years ago: "So, why did you choose UD?" By the time I arrived here as a freshmen, I had my programmed response committed to memory and ready to go at a moment's notice should anyone ask. It went something like this: "As soon as I had visited UD, I knew I wanted to go there. Actually, it was the only school I applied to. It's a pretty unique place, you see. It has a very real and legitimate spiritual aspect to it, but the focus still remains on the superior academics." It is true, depending on my audience, I would often substitute some of my less lofty motivations for attending UD, which included the opportunity to trounce around Europe for a semester and, of course, the male to female student ratio.

After four years, my answer has not changed one ounce. In fact, I still use it to this day. UD is an incredibly unique, and important, place. As sappy as it sounds, this university is a sanctuary of wisdom; a place of genuine and humble intellectual endeavor.

It earnestly strives to be a city on a hill; a light to the rest of the world. And we have been lucky enough to spend four whole years in its halls. This university has given us a gift of immeasurable magnitude. And, lest we ever forget it, they will be sending us frequent friendly reminders of just how indebted we should feel.

But what difference does it make to us now? After today, we're outta here, we're off to live our own lives. Sure, it was great for four years, but we're through with all that fancy book learnin'. Let's face it folks, the Aeneid is not the most enthralling book in the world. I think its OK to poke fun at Virgil since he *has* been dead for a while.

As it turns out, we can't escape the effects of our time at UD. We have been forever changed, shaped, and molded by these last four years. Classmates, you may not remember twenty years from now about how a just man lives seven hundred and twenty nine times more happily than an unjust one, but you'll never forget that there is more to this world than appearances. You may not remember which one is Rosencrantz and which one is Guildenstern, but, with a little work, you'll be able to express your deepest thoughts and emotions eloquently. You might even get the Yahwist, the Eloist, and the Priestly author confused at times, but you'll always have a sense of awe at the immensity of the Western Christian tradition. I know there are countless equations and formulas I learned here (including how to calculate the obliquity of the ecliptic) that have permanently left my brain, but I have been given a profound appreciation for the elegance and majesty of God's creative intelligence that I never imagined I would have.

Education is not an event; it is a process, the aim of which Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain says, "will always be grasped in a partial and imperfect manner." We should never think of ourselves as "educat-*ed*", in the past tense, as if we had successfully learned everything there was to know, but rather, as educat-*ive*; as people who have lifelong commitments to furthering their knowledge of that which is.

Well, I think that brings us to my second topic: where are we seniors going after these commencement ceremonies end? I have a feeling most of us will make a mad dash to the cold drinks waiting for us on the mall. But what about after that? We will disperse from this bubble out to all corners of the globe. Some of us will make journeys into the great unknown of the "real world". For some of us our journeys will take us back to where we started four years ago: to a university admissions department to continue further in our schooling and further into debt. And some of us will make the dreaded voyage into the depths of our parents basements. For the majority of us, our lifestyle will have to drastically change. No more sleeping in until 10; no more three hour lunch breaks; no more working for just three or four hours a day. Unless, of course, you become a college professor.

But beyond these cursory observations, what will become to us? Well, the answer is, I don't really know, at least not any better than any of my classmates. Our situation can be likened to that of Mary just after the Annunciation. All of a sudden everything we have become accustomed to is about to change. Crazy things are going to happen to us, and some of these things we'll have absolutely no control over. But, as always, we have

Mary to look to as an example of ultimate virtue. Let us respond as she did, saying, "Let it be done unto me according to thy word." This attitude can be summed up in a saying that I got from someone who, sorry professors, has taught me more than all of you combined: my mother. The words would always come when I most needed and least wanted to hear them: "Life is ten percent what happens to you, and ninety percent how you deal with it." It's not about what situation you find yourself in, no matter how bleak it may seem; it's about what you make of the life you've been given.

But holy women aren't the only ones with good advice. We must realize that *we* decide whether the glass is half full or half empty, and that it actually is whatever we say it is. We can choose to have the attitude of modern philosopher turned comedian Mitch Hedberg, who said, "The depressing thing about tennis is that no matter how good I get, I'll never be as good as a wall." Or we can decide to see the bright side of things, an attitude encouraged time and time again by poet Jack Handy who once wrote, "If you go parachuting, and your parachute doesn't open, and your friends are all watching you fall, I think a funny gag would be to pretend you were swimming."

Hopefully that brief comedic interlude has woken up most of the seniors, because now I have something I really want to say specifically to them. As bishop Grahmann spoke of last evening, Pope John Paul II often encouraged his flock with the maxim: Do not be afraid! And so I too quote John Paul, "Do not be afraid to be the saints of the new millennium!" For most of us, fear will not come in the form of the horrors of war or the despair of extreme poverty. No, it will creep its way into our everyday activities and our cozy middle class lives. And so I exhort my classmates: Do not be afraid to speak up when unpopular words need to be spoken. Do not be afraid to lose friends by refusing to participate in even small injustices. Don't be afraid to remain chaste when the opportunity arises to do otherwise. Don't be afraid to pass up a huge promotion because it would mean putting your spouse and children on the back burner. Do not be afraid to sacrifice what you *think* will make you happy for what you know, deep down, is the only thing that could ever make you completely happy: God.

He is looking out for us, you know. If you want proof, just consider for a moment what liturgical feast just happens to be the same day as graduation! Coincidence? I think not! Seniors, let us collectively put ourselves in the shoes of the Apostles on the day of Pentecost: afraid, lost, leaderless, unsure of their futures, but with immense hope welling inside them for something beyond this world. And then the Holy Spirit, the giver of life!, descended on them. Maybe we can see today's heat as modern day tongues of fire. God will not abandon us! He will give us even more graces as we go forth from here today. He has given us the opportunity, with the help of our parents, to attend this school and plant within ourselves the seed of wisdom which is knowledge. So as we all go our separate ways, let us allow this University to truly be our "Alma Mater", our nourishing mother, as we continue to learn from this feast of knowledge that she has given us.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jamie Louis Antonelli". The signature is written in dark ink and is located in the bottom right corner of the page.