
GRADUATION: A BIG STEP IN LIFE



Whether at the high school, community college or university level, graduation is a major step in a student's life. If graduation marks the evaluation of knowledge acquired and training completed, it can also be the opportunity to evaluate one's quality of being. In what follows I want to extend to each and every graduate my most sincere congratulations and assure them of my prayer on this, their special day.

MAJOR DIMENSIONS

While I was studying in sociology one of our professors remarked: "If you are heading towards a career in teaching, social work or pastoral ministry you will need faith, hope, and charity. If you lack these it will not be possible for you to get on in life and to reach your goals. You must believe in yourself, in your neighbour, in the world, and in God. If you do not love yourself, you will not love your neighbour, the world, nor God." This statement came as a shock to several fellow-students. That day our professor had to stay behind after class for quite a while, to explain his convictions.

POWERFUL VIRTUES

For his part the French writer Jean Onimus, in a book titled *Lettres à ses fils* ("Letters to His Sons") names four virtues as being indispensable to success in life. The author does not intend to be preachy or to give a programme of resolutions to be taken; his intention is to offer tools for the development of willpower in his sons. These "tools" are: intelligence, a sense of wonder, imagination, and generosity. Intelligence is an effort to understand in order to love more, admire more, and forgive more. This kind of intelligence gauges one's bigness of heart and mind and, as such, is an element of generosity. There are brilliant people with every appearance of intelligence, who know nothing because they have no heart. There is much modesty and love, in intelligence; it does not seek display but it radiates outward. Its simplicity disconcerts the cunning and delights the gentle, because it is a rare quality. It is always easier to be ingenuous than profound and, if unkindness is crafty, it is kindness that is truly intelligent. Intelligence which is not directed by love cannot approach the mystery: from the start it is doomed to not understand it.

STARTLING ADMIRATION

No two days are alike, if we stop to look at them. The more science explains certain phenomena, the more is our admiration triggered. To live does not mean getting used to things. What we truly live and experience is unique, therefore of great price. Some people, rather than be sensitive to these experiences see only the similarities and so remain stuck in dreariness. Admiration consists in keeping alive throughout one's life the joy of discovery, of knowledge, of contemplation. This last is perhaps the most necessary to the development of the spiritual life. It is the quality of poets and artists. What graduate is not a poet, when the fire of admiration is ever alive within? These individuals know when to stop to contemplate. Admiration can be a special path to God which bridges the steep banks of anxiety and doubt. A contemplative spirit is one that goes ever deeper: there is never any end to discovering a masterpiece.

PLENTIFUL IMAGINATION

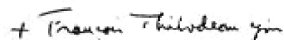
Imagination is a mark of the vibrancy of youth, it is the pre-eminent faculty of creative and searching minds who seek to better themselves and the world around them. Where there is no imagination, where there is no vision there is no progress and no thinking but only repetitive actions. Use your imagination in your professional life to improve your methods, your output, your profession or trade. Imagination and life: these are one and the same. Imagination and happiness: by itself it can change your life, transform the most humdrum realities into sources of joy and happiness.

A GENEROUS LIFE

A successful life is a generous life. As a matter of fact, the sole justification for living is love: to love, to be loved, all is there. Success in this overrides all other victories and all defeats as well as all suffering and burdens of misfortune. Only a generous heart can love, and they are sometimes graced with being loved in return. This is why a successful life is not the one which has accumulated wealth but the one which has forgotten oneself for others. Generosity cannot be improvised: it is a work of patience and courage, a life-long task.

THE COMMANDMENT OF LOVE

Given such a context, Christ's teaching illuminates our whole lives: *«This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. »* (Jn. 15:12-13) A graduation can truly be an occasion for measuring the quality of the love you will have for one another. You know the words of Saint Paul: they can help you and guide you through life: *« If I speak with human tongues and angelic as well, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries, if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient; love is kind. Love is not jealous, it does not put on airs, it is not snobbish. Love is never rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not prone to anger; neither does it brood over injuries. Love does not rejoice in what is wrong but rejoices with the truth. There is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. Love has no end. »* (1 Cor. 13:1b-8a) Dear Graduates, I wish you all to be filled with this love throughout your lives.



+ François Thibodeau
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