

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, Executive Vice President, University of Notre Dame, at the Commencement Exercises of Saint Mary's Academy, South Bend, Indiana, Thursday, May 29, 1952.)

If we were to cast about this morning for one word that could adequately describe this occasion, I would chose the word happy.

It is a happy day especially for all you graduates because it marks the successful achievement of a task you began twelve years ago. There were a lot of hurdles along the way - times when school seemed the dullest thing in the world - and each succeeding June you probably wondered if your turn would ever come to sit on a stage with cap and gown. But despite Latin or history or design or geometry, you did make it, and you have every reason to be happy here today in what you have accomplished so well.

It is a happy day for your mothers and fathers too, because there is nothing that gives parents more joy than to see their own flesh and blood achieve the success they have hoped for, prayed for, yet, paid for since the day you were born. All of your families and relatives rejoice with you today, and share your success, because you have made many dreams come true for all of them. And doesn't that give you something to keep striving for through life - to make all those who love you - from God down - proud of you and happy with you.

It's a happy day for the good Sisters and all of your teachers too. Some people invest their lives, and talents, and energy in careers and homes and business ventures. These good nuns and all those who help them have invested all that they have, all that they are, in you. If you

make good, as you have up to now, their investment pays off and their joy is full. Your lives are their passport to heaven and a key to most of their happiness here below. I know you will always try to be worthy of them.

Because it is such a happy occasion for all concerned, I know that I speak for everyone here when I congratulate all the graduates on a task well done.

If your lives were to stop here, at this moment, there wouldn't be any reason to say anything else. But this is a graduation ceremony and graduation means stepping forward to something ahead. This is a commencement talk, which presupposes that something is not just ended, but commencing to happen.

That something, of course, is your lives beyond high school. Where they will lead you, nobody knows right now. But wherever you will be next year, whatever you will be doing, all the years now ending in this graduation ceremony have prepared you to face whatever will meet you in the days ahead.

If you have learned anything these past twelve years, it has not been how to make a living, but how to live - how to live fully, intelligently, fruitfully as Christian women. Moreover, your education here has not been geared merely to being happy in this life - but how to use this life as a stepping stone to eternity.

It is only in the light of this latter consideration that your education at Saint Mary's Academy will be fully understood and appreciated.

You may have wondered at times during your schooling here how practically your preparation for life has been. The attitudes given here may have seemed unrealistic compared to the attitudes you see in the world all around you and ahead.

You have been taught here to put the Kingdom of God and His justice first - whereas in everyday life, God and His justice will often get last place - if people are interested enough to give God and His justice any place at all.

You have been taught here the necessity and the power of prayer - the wisdom of looking to God for the help that really matters in the difficult problems of life. Yet you know that many people in the world never pray at all. Many even consider prayer a sign of weakness. Christ says "Without me you can do nothing." They say, "I'll make out all right by myself. If I need help, I'll take a Dale Carnegie course." For them, God just doesn't exist as one who cares and can help.

You have been taught here to go to Mass and to worship God on Sunday. A lot of your friends will look upon Sunday as a free day for extra sleep after Saturday night, or doing the laundry, or sunning themselves at the beach. Church is something for old ladies or young ones who want to show off their Spring finery at Eastertime.

You were taught here to love, honor, obey, and respect your parents - to consult them on the important decisions in your lives - decisions that will soon be facing you. You'll hear all around you the refrain, "The old folks are behind the times. Go along with the gang. What your parents don't know won't bother them."

You have learned here at Saint Mary's that modesty and purity are the bulwarks of Christian womanhood. The world today doesn't think so. It would have you dress like chorus girls and parade sex as an exciting plaything - an allurements to pleasure at any cost. Dr. Kinsey will say that virgins are few and far between - why make the effort to be different. Enjoy yourself today, forget about tomorrow.

Here you learned that marriage is a sacrament - therefore something sacred effected by God - that you get married once to the right person carefully selected for reasons other than mere looks or bank account, and that you use married life as a means of getting holier and making him holier because of his life with you. All this, too, is old fashioned in the world today. Look at the marriage announcements of really important people in TIME magazine and you'll find more getting married for the second, third, and fourth time, than for the first. Look on the front page of your newspaper and you'll find a girl who advertises herself as a prospect for \$10,000 - like a used car.

By this time, you may honestly wonder if it has all been foolish - giving you these standards, this Christian education for life, when so many of the prevalent currents of life are so universally un-Christian. Maybe it would be foolish if we did not complete the picture.

In the world today there are not merely these unChristian attitudes, but there are many unhappy, restless people who do not enjoy much peace of soul or prospects beyond the fleeting and empty pleasures of the moment. There are many ruined lives, many frustrated hopes, many hurt feelings.

True, people by the thousands are trying today to improvise their rules of life without God and without Christ, Our Lord. But they have not thereby lived well, or intelligently, or happily.

This leaves each of you with an important question to answer before you leave Saint Mary's today. Do you really believe in the values taught here - even though people all around you do and will repudiate them. Do you have the conviction and the courage to be different. The problem of life is not solved by merely saying yes here today - you will have to re-affirm it a thousand times in the days to come, when at every turn you will have to decide anew whether to live with or without Christ.

No one can live your life for you. The best that can be done, has been done. You have been given a pattern. It now depends upon you to accept it, to embrace it, to live it.

I would like to leave you with the thought that upon your acceptance of this challenge depends not only your own happiness and security now and in eternity, but the happiness of many of the people you will live with, work with, and recreate with in the days to come.

Don't ever apologize for your Christian faith in the pattern. You have something that the world needs badly. You graduates, and the many other graduates of Catholic schools throughout the land this year, can take your Christian pattern for life into a sick world and help make it better - if you have enough faith and courage to face life with Christ.

Make your motto the inspired words of St. Paul - "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good."

This is the most important work of your life that you are commencing here today - wherever you go, whatever you do next year. It is a work that points towards a greater and far more important graduating day - a day that will be the prelude of a greater and more lasting happiness than we experience here this morning - if only you complete your course in life as successfully as you have completed your course in preparation for life here at Saint Mary's Academy. I trust that all you graduates here today - after a life faithful to what you have learned here - will be on hand and happy at that eternal commencement towards which we are all heading. Then at last, the true significance of all you have learned here will be manifest, and I am sure that a weary world will have a deeper word of congratulations than mine for the help it received along the way from the Saint Mary's graduation Class of 1952.

God bless and keep you all, and may His Mother guide you ever.