

Archbishop Lori's Homily: The John Carroll School Baccalaureate Mass

The John Carroll School

Baccalaureate Mass

St. Margaret Parish

May 24, 2018

First, my warmest congratulations to the John Carroll School graduates, class of 2018! I'm delighted to celebrate this, your Baccalaureate Mass, as you give thanks to God for the blessings of your years at John Carroll and as you look toward a future full of hope. We are proud of you and we have high hopes for you!

In meeting with a group of you, our graduates, earlier this month, I was impressed with your spirit of gratitude for your years at John Carroll: First, your gratitude to the Lord who provided you with such a great education, rooted in our Catholic faith, distinguished by academic excellence, enriched by a spirit of service to others, and nurtured by friends and mentors. When I asked a number of you to offer me one word that sums up your experience at John Carroll, this is how you responded: "the best" // "spirited" // "dedicated" // "supportive" // "teamwork" - all good descriptors of what an excellent high school education should be. And thank you for not using the word "awesome"!

So let me join you, the graduates, first in thanking God but also in thanking your parents for providing you with such a fine education. They made a lot of sacrifices to send you to John Carroll because they love you and they knew it would be good for you and your future. And they were right, weren't they? So let's thank your moms and dads!

Throughout your time at John Carroll, you had the benefit of wonderful teachers and mentors . . . they are very good at what they do! To be sure, they imparted to you a lot of knowledge and skill. You are well equipped for college and you've acquired virtues and skills that will serve you well as you enter upon your adult lives. Let's express our warmest thanks to those who, by word and example, taught you here at

the John Carroll School.

In view of the rich and wonderful experience you've had at John Carroll, I was a little surprised that you chose the reading from Joshua which describes how the chosen people emerged from wandering in the desert for forty years. I trust you did not mean to compare your four years at John Carroll with the forty tough years the Chosen People spent in the desert. Nor, I assume, did you mean to say that the colleges where you'll be matriculating will be like the Promised Land... that remains to be seen!

The part of the reading that applies to you is where Joshua reminds the Chosen People to remember God's Word in their new situation, to hold fast to all that Moses had taught them while they were in the desert. As tough as that experience was, the people of Israel came to know God in the desert and they entered into a covenant with him. Joshua is saying to them, as you move on to the next phase, don't forget what Moses taught; don't forget what God has done for you!

And that's the message I'd like to deliver to you. Your parents have shown you the importance of your faith and have exemplified the virtues that you will need to be happy, wise, productive, and holy. John Carroll has helped you to understand your faith more deeply, certainly through your studies but also the times you prayed together and in the Christian spirit that pervades the entire school. Cling to your faith. It's more valuable even than a marketable skill. There will come a time in life, years from now, when you will move on from the things that interest you now; but there should never be a time when you move away from God and from the practice of your faith. Without God there's no promised land because without God we truly can't be happy.

Part of graduation is happy because you celebrate your achievements but there is another part that is perhaps not so happy. Commencement means a parting of the ways. Never again will your class be together as it has been for these past four years. And from my meeting with representatives of your class, I can tell that you're a group that has stuck together through thick and thin.

As you go away for the summer and think about a whole new set of classmates, you might feel excited but you also might feel a little overwhelmed or lonely.

The second reading you chose, in my opinion, addresses those feelings very well. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that, even when we take a brand new step in life, when we move away from our comfort zone and into a new situation, we are never alone; we are never all by ourselves. The Bible's way of saying this is that 'we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses' – by all the angels and saints, by our family and friends who have gone before us!

They are with you spiritually and they are praying for you. You will still be surrounded by the love of your parents and your teachers who care about you, who love you, and who want what is best for you. Most of all, the Letter to the Hebrews tells you, 'keep your eyes fixed on Jesus.' If you have a real relationship with the Lord, you are never alone. Even though we cannot see him, the Lord walks with us through life. Among the ways we grow in friendship with Jesus is through prayer – prayer in private, Mass on Sunday, Confession on a regular basis. *Stay close to the Lord and he will stay close to you.*

And in the Gospel, Jesus tells us not to worry too much about our comfort but rather to seek first the Kingdom of God – to seek first a life in which we love God and serve the needs of others. And here, you, the Class of 2018 shine like stars. You told me all about the Romero Service Club, your service trips to Honduras and to Haiti, the coat drives by which you provide a warm winter coat to those in need, the dance marathons in support of cancer patients, the list is pretty long. I remember sitting there, listening to you, and being very impressed. I still am!

That's what Jesus had in mind in today's Gospel when he tells us not to worry about ourselves and our comfort too much, in other words, *not to be self-centered but to think of others first*. My hope and prayer is that the spirit of service you learned at John Carroll will always be a part of your life – that you'll always be doing for others – that you find joy in reaching out in respect and love for those who are in need.

One thing is for sure. No matter how well we do in life, we can't take it with us. The only thing we bring into eternity is what we gave away on earth. My hope and prayer is you will spend your lives loving God and serving those who can repay you only with their love. That is the recipe for a truly happy and fulfilled life – the kind of life you learned to live here at John Carroll School. Congratulations, class of 2018! God

bless you and keep you always in his love!