



Today is a wonderful day, and it's also a day filled with mixed emotions. Parents are feeling happiness and pride at your child's achievements, and yet some sadness that today marks a major change in your family's lives.

I have mixed emotions about today too.

I have been simultaneously excited to celebrate this day with the Class of 2019 ... and dreading this day as well.

And maybe like some of you, when I have mixed emotions, I tend to procrastinate (even more than normal!).

Especially writing a speech like this, when I want to say everything, but only have a limited time to say it.

This past Thursday the deadline was getting uncomfortably close, and I got into the office early, fully intending to start writing.

So, I sat down and checked social media ... because we all know *that's* the best way to get started on any task. The first thing that popped up on my timeline was a refreshingly positive announcement.

The State of Pennsylvania had declared Thursday, May 23rd, the 143rd day of the year, 1-4-3 day.

Some of us who are a little bit older may know what "1-4-3" means. It comes from a television show that many parents here today watched as children (it went off the air in 2001, the year that most of this class was born!) In our childhood, TV binge-watching meant Sesame Street, Mr. Roger's Neighborhood & the Electric Company back-to-back-to-back, sitting as close as your mom would let you get to a black & white tv with a screen the size of an ipad (an ipad weighing 50 pounds).

We watched them back-to-back-to-back because it wasn't easy to change the channel: remotes didn't exist, the dials were labeled VHF & UHF (and who knew what those meant), and touching the television meant that you risked messing up the antenna reception.

(I've totally lost everyone here on the floor, by the way)

So, what is 1-4-3? 1-4-3 was a code, that we were taught by Fred Rogers, of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood.

It meant, "I love you," for the number of letters in each word.

I, L-O-V-E, Y-O-U.

Still procrastinating, I headed down the hallway for my 6th cup of coffee of the day, and stopped in our Chapel before daily Mass. When I looked at the readings for this 1-4-3 Thursday, the Gospel included this:

"As the Father loves me, so I also love you.

Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love."

Jesus continues in this chapter of John's Gospel:

"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you."

OK, I got the hint. And it's exactly what I want to tell you today.

In my role, I'm often asked "what's so different about Catholic education?" "Why should my child come to Gibbons?" "Just give me the elevator speech," they say.

Here it is: We act in love.

We say the word love, openly and without embarrassment.

We do everything we can to reflect God's love to our students and their families.

We make school decisions based upon love.

We laugh together, and we cry together, because we love each other.

We encourage and challenge, we praise and forgive out of love.

We love to share our gifts, and love others so they may be brave and generous enough to share their God-given talents with us.

We act in love.

Many schools will say that they want their students to be happy.

But happiness is only one emotion, and too often people mean happiness as the absence of sadness or disappointment.

One of the most important things that Mr. Rogers taught in his television ministry, was that it was incredibly important to share *every emotion*.

His show wasn't just about playful imagination – he addressed tough topics such as divorce, war, hatred and death.

He told children that it was OK to cry, that it was often the most difficult to forgive those who were closest to us, and that saying goodbye is really hard.

If you choose to love, you will experience ALL the emotions: happiness and sadness, disappointment and gratitude, tears and laughter, the joy of "hello" and the pain of "goodbye."

Choosing to love means embracing ALL the emotions. It means realizing that tears and laughter are nothing to be embarrassed about ... in fact, they may be as close to perfect as we get.

So, this afternoon, I want to take this opportunity to say what we put off saying because we think that we won't say it perfectly, or we think we'll have another time to say it.

To Dr. Fedewa, to our Board of Trustees and especially to Mr. Peter Charland who is finishing his term as our Board Chair:

I love how you allow our school to make decisions based upon what is best for our students and families. The way we do it may not always be according to the book, but you always respect and value our educators and trust us to do what is right on

behalf of our families. I am grateful for your leadership and commitment to our school.

To our parents:

I love how much you trust our school to take care of your children, and also trust us when we challenge you as parents to engage with Gibbons in a totally different way.

I love that you make parent meetings and gatherings some of the most joyful, loudest events on our campus, where the rest of us are inspired by your remarkable creativity and energy.

I love how you make it impossible to sign up for things because you fill up every spot literally within minutes, and how it doesn't matter anyway because you welcome every parent who shows up whether they're on the list or not.

I love that you so openly share with us the joy, the challenges, and the faith of your families. That you always introduce to us grandparents, aunts & uncles and younger siblings, and that you allow us to become a part of your beautiful families. Thank you.

To my colleagues:

Fred Rogers said that "The best teacher in the world is someone who loves what he or she does, and just loves it in front of their students."

I love that you are willing to play, dance, juggle, cheer, laugh and sing in front of our school community. You model both how to share God's gifts, and the beautiful joy that comes from sharing those gifts.

I love how you are willing to be vulnerable and emotional in front of our students. I love that you get choked up at Senior Supper, Kairos, and when our school families experience the most difficult challenges.

I love that you are brave enough to be fully yourselves in your teaching, coaching, directing and leading, that you are authentic in how you model creativity, curiosity, reflective practice and faithfulness.

I love that you are fiercely protective of our school's legacy and history, passionate about our school's mission, and fully committed to a vision of an even better future for our school. I know you will make it happen.

To the class of 2019:

I love your good mornings at the front door, your hellos in the hallways, and your goodbyes at the end of the day, no matter how late that might be.

I love how you are willing to serve, always willing to help. In the small things like holding a door or offering encouragement, or in the enormous annual projects such as Habitat or Shepherd's Table Soup Kitchen, your class has always generously offered yourselves without hesitation or reservation.

I love that you are willing to be challenged and that you meet that challenge. You're the only school in North Carolina that chooses to play up in a division for bigger schools. In a month it will be officially announced that Gibbons is the top athletics program in the entire state for all schools this year.

I love how often you say thank you. Every visitor to our campus is, for some reason, shocked by how often they are thanked by students, but they very quickly realize that you share genuine gratitude.

I love how caring and thoughtful you are. I love that you value your classmates, you are sensitive to those who need support, and that you share optimism with a world that needs hope.

I love how excited you get for Cookie Tuesday and Wagon Wheel Fridays. For Green Army Tailgates and retreats. For Freshman Welcome and Baccalaureate Mass.

I love all these things we will miss, but most of all, I will miss doing them with you.

I'd like to offer one more quote from Fred Rogers:

*"Often when you think you're at the end of something,
you're at the beginning of something else.
I've felt that many times.*

My hope for all of us is that 'the miles we go before we sleep' will be filled with all the feelings that come from deep caring

- delight, sadness, joy, wisdom -

and that in all the endings of our life, we will be able to see the new beginnings."

For the Class of 2019 it is my fervent hope and prayer that you will continue to love God and love others so that you feel ALL the emotions.

That in every new beginning, such as today,
that you know that you are called to love and be loved,
without any fear but rather gratitude at feeling ALL the emotions.

For many years at commencement I have told graduates
that we can't wait to welcome them home.

And again today, I say that to the Class of 2019.

Our Gibbons home has never really been a place.

Gibbons is wherever we remember a story, hear a song, catch a social media post, or see green and gold (maybe white polo and khakis),
and it causes us to stop and feel ALL those emotions again.

That is when we are all back at Gibbons, back at home.

And at those moments, I hope you remember the most important thing, the thing that makes Gibbons home:

(1) I (4) L-O-V-E (3) Y-O-U.