



By Sean Cleary '19

Good afternoon and welcome to Dr. Fedewa, members of the Board of Trustees, educators, parents, family and friends, and members of the class of 2019!

Look at this group.

See how much we've grown in 4 years? Well, except for me, I'm still short, but I'm waiting! Four years ago, on our first day of class, my freshman biology teacher had an unexpected message for us: that the people sitting around me would be lifelong friends that would help shape the rest of my life. To be honest, this seemed a bit daunting, given that I knew *almost* 5 people at Gibbons at the time, and that I wasn't the most social of freshmen, and that my new retainer gave me a serious lisp.

So how did this awkward 13-year old end up choosing to come to Gibbons, mistakenly arriving at freshman welcome day an hour and a half early? You might think it was the challenging academics or abundant extracurriculars. But, it wasn't.

Rather, it was the people, who seemed to be genuinely happy and excited to be there, with a light gleaming in their eyes. It was the people that sat with me when I arrived at an hour and half too early, who talked to me and helped me feel at ease when I needed it most. It was the people that came over and chose to sit with me when I knew absolutely no one in the cafeteria.

That fall, I had a little extra to be nervous about, since I had never gone to Catholic school and I wasn't really sure how it would go. Yes, I knew I would have to take theology classes and go to mass a few times a year, but for me, that seemed worth it if it meant I got to go to Gibbons. I even thought that if I sat there everyday and listened intently, I might learn something interesting. My parents have always asked me what I learned at school each day when I came home, and I realized that, at Gibbons, I usually started talking about theology because that was all completely new to me. My theology class ended up being one of my favorites freshman year because I learned so much in it.

But "faith" didn't just stop in the classroom. I realized it spilled out into the entire school. It spilled out into the people. I realized *that* is why people were so bright, so friendly, and so happy. Being in an environment rooted in faith had fostered people that truly cared about each other - they check in on you when you're gone or surprise you for your birthday or help you with literally anything. They give up their lunch as a senior just to talk to a couple of freshmen every day. They personally convince you to keep coming to a club and stay involved. They constantly encourage you at practice when you know you're not at your best. They go above and beyond service requirements at preschools and soup kitchens because they *want* to serve others. It spread to the teachers, too, who so clearly care about all of us that they spend all evening preparing and serving us an amazing dinner at Senior Supper this week. Or, they give up hours and hours of their weekends to be a confirmation sponsor, as my theology teacher did this year.

See, by the end of last year, I came to realize that I wanted to join the church and become Catholic. I talked to my parents about it, and, not only did they approve, but they wanted to join too. Together, we spent the past year in RCIA classes, and we finally joined the Church a few weeks ago at the Easter Vigil. It was so special for me to see that aspect of our mission

statement, which I originally had approached with ambivalence, fulfilled so meaningfully. What was even more special was Baccalaureate Mass on Friday. No longer did I have to walk down and cross my arms. For the first time at a Gibbons mass, I got to walk up and receive the Eucharist. For the first time, I got to feel that unity we are all gifted when we receive Christ's body. So too did my parents, who were always alongside me and helped me realize how profound an impact Gibbons has had on me.

So, as we continue on from this place, carry with you the faith we have cultivated here. If you take it out into the world and be a light to those around you, you will inspire them as you have inspired me. If you continue to love those around you and show it constantly through your actions, you will be a force for good that can change the world. Others have noticed and will continue to notice, because this kind of faith, affirmed by our actions, is truly special. When we take this out into the "real world," we can bring a bit of Gibbons to others. So, thank you, each of you, for making Gibbons such a special place filled with the light of faith; it has transformed me and I am extremely grateful.