



### Junior Mass Speech By Lauren Hackett '21

Good evening Father Daniel, Mrs. Barkan, administrators, educators, parents, guests, and students. Junior Mass is a great time to gather together with friends and family to celebrate the junior class as a community. Here we mark the halfway point of high school but, more importantly, acknowledge growth in our understanding of our faith. I have been so blessed to have a family that goes to mass together weekly and helps me to grow in my faith life. Parents are the best role models, and they don't get thanked enough for the sacrifices they make for their children. Their representation of undying love is one that students should try to follow every day at school. At Gibbons, faith is shown in and out of the classroom daily. When you first walk through the doors freshman year, students celebrate mass together, and when you leave the school four years later, you celebrate mass one last time as a class.

Franciscan Youth International has shaped my faith life. This service-based club, led by Mr. DeLarosa, gives each student a chance to give back to the community. Attending Brookdale Nursing Home with this group once a month to do crafts and games with the senior citizens has taught me that we truly show Christ's love when we are giving of ourselves to others. Senior Citizen Prom, where Gibbons students create a setting of a prom with decorations and a DJ, has shown me for two years now that little acts of kindness can enhance someone's day. The community here at Gibbons is built around this faith foundation and bonds us together. As John said in the gospel tonight, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Always show others love and joy through your actions and words.

I have personally experienced the kindness and love here at Gibbons is by the greetings I receive from friends and educators. Every time I walk past Mr. Curatolo, the assistant principal, in the hallway, he makes an effort to greet me and ask how my day is, making me feel valued and cared for. Whenever I enter my math classroom, Mrs. Troy, my math teacher, makes sure to welcome me, showing her genuine desire to see me. Mr. Faur, a theology teacher who I have never personally had as a teacher, eagerly agreed when my friend and I came to him with a club idea and had said hello to me in the hallway every day since. The list of educators that greet other students and me this way goes on, showing their love for teaching and their students.

The educators here at Gibbons are both teachers and friends. Their commitment to the happiness of their students reflects in classes daily. With so many opportunities to get engaged, we can form close relationships. Many of the educators spend their days not only teaching but leading clubs and activities for the enjoyment of the students. Little acts such as a teacher sitting down to talk to you and your friends at lunch and to ask about the day make every student feel valued and loved. Freshman year, when Mr. DeLarosa, my theology teacher would take us outside to pray the Stations of the Cross every Wednesday in Lent, I would think, "Why is he doing this to us? Doesn't he realize how cold it is?" but then I realized that he is making an incredible sacrifice, taking out of his teaching and lesson plan to teach us how to pray. This sacrificial love shown is a model for every one of us to aspire to be like.

After graduation, many of us may never have another chance to sit in another theology class or have an opportunity to attend daily mass at school. These opportunities are quickly taken for granted, without realizing that it will not stay like this forever. Gibbons will give me the strength to go out and do good works on my own following graduation. With the remaining year and a half, we have here, find time to go out of your way to do nice things for others, or ask

about a teacher's day. As St. Teresa of Calcutta has said, "Spread faith everywhere you go. Let no one ever come to you without leaving happier". Learning this through my teachers and peers who greet me every day, the lessons learned at Cardinal Gibbons will have lasting impacts that will continuously influence our lives. Let us go using the teachings of faith, service, and leadership that we have learned to be the best models of love for our families, friends, and our classmates. Thank you.