Junior Class Mass

May 17, 2023

Class of 2024, before I became president of Marist School, I was an advisor for five years. As I reflected on those years, I couldn't recall when I gave my advisees any advice. That explains why I am speaking to you, the junior class that is also rising seniors. Tonight is my last chance to offer advice before I graduate and become the Rector of Marist. The advice or guidance I want to provide focuses on the new leadership role that is now yours because you will be seniors. The school has been preparing you for this moment and has expectations of your class, and I want to specify what they are.

First, I want to begin by recognizing you face pressures that I didn't face when I was your age. That translates into dealing with a lot more stress. I know how challenging life can be. I also know how wonderful life can be. I want to reassure you that as difficult as life can be at times, press on. You'll be okay. I am cheering for you.

When addressing your mental and emotional health, there is no shame in admitting you need help addressing those issues. Students routinely say, "I need help," when it comes to learning math, playing a musical instrument, or how to play a new position in a sport. They may even ask someone to tutor them. The school needs the senior class to say those words when they apply to your mental and emotional health. The school also needs the senior class to be on the lookout for their peers who are struggling. If they cannot say those three words, "I need help," then go to a trusted adult or counselor and say those words on their behalf. The school needs the senior class to take good care of themselves and each other. Class of 2024, show the other classes how it is done.

At some point next year, I will ask your teachers, coaches, and campus ministers how they describe the Class of 2024. I want to hear them say you are generous, respectful, kind, good-natured, sensitive, caring, outgoing, dependable, fun-loving, responsible, and young women and men of faith. I want to hear them say that you were a joy to teach, a pleasure to coach, and a real blessing in their lives and not a curse.

To make what I just described a reality, your class must be united, or using Fr. Colin's words, be of one mind and heart. That plea for unity echoes that of Jesus for his disciples and the Church when he prayed, "that they all may be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you" (John 17:20-23). Class of 2024, show the other classes how it is done.

The school has one more expectation for the Class of 2024. Fr. Colin described the Society of Mary as fighting the battles of the Lord under the banner of Mary. That thought came to mind while watching the highlights of the recent coronation of King Charles III of England. Part of the ritual included several swords being brought and symbolically presented to the king. The last and most important one is called the sword of spiritual Justice. That is a reference to the sword of the Spirit. It is the last piece of the armor of God that Paul tells us to take up in his letter to the Ephesians, where he writes, "Take up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17) This also references our baptism when we were anointed to share in Christ's ministry as priest, prophet, and king.

Rising seniors, you will be tempted to draw another sword, that being words that are hateful, mean, intolerant, divisive, cruel, and the like. Nowadays, that sword is the main weapon of choice in the political arena and social media. We see its corrosive effects in our nation's discourse that impact how students relate to each other, such as when they resort to racist speech or bullying. Using power in manipulative and coercive ways was abhorrent to Fr. Colin. It was one of his famous three no's, with the other two being pride and greed.

Class of 2024, should you come upon those wielding that sword, Marist expects you to draw the sword of the Spirit and draw upon the spiritual gift of fortitude with which you were gifted in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Be courageous and come to the defense of those students who are defenseless and outnumbered. Marist expects you to confront those under the influence of the darker forces at work in our world and defend those being wounded emotionally and psychologically as a result. We expect you to be God's answer to the prayer of your fellow students who, amid their suffering and loneliness, cry out "Where is God?" Class of 2024, show the other classes how it is done.

Lastly, King Solomon's first kingly act was to pray to God and ask for help, specifically for wisdom, to lead the people of Israel. Class of 2024, you are following in King Solomon's footsteps by coming together this evening and praying to God for help since you are the *de facto* leaders of the school. I will adapt King Solomon's prayer we heard in the first reading and conclude by making his prayer your prayer.

Class of 2024, bow your heads and pray,

> Now, LORD, my God, you have made us, the Class of 2024 school leaders, to succeed the Class of 2023. However, we are inexperienced and unsure if we are up to the task. We are your servant. Give your servant, therefore, a compassionate heart with which to lead your people, our peers, and the wisdom to distinguish between good and evil so that we might lead them along the path of righteousness. Amen.

Class of 2024, show the other classes how to lead. You may never have thought of yourselves as exercising leadership in the ways I described. Well, you have all summer to adjust your thinking.

And remember, I am cheering for you.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.