GEORGETOWN PREPARATORY SCHOOL
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REV. JAMES R. VAN DYKE, S.J., PRESIDENT
COMMENCEMENT 2025

Fr. Rector Campbell; Mr. Headmaster Glennon, Members of the Board, Esteemed Members of our Faculty and Staff, Dear Parents, Families and Friends, and, most of all, Our Brothers, the Alumni of the Great Class of 2025, Mr. President Garrett and Mr. Vice President McDonough:

Well, Gentlemen, it's time. You have your medals. The diplomas are in your hands. And the awards are plum run out. It is time for you to leave. It's over. And it will never be again.

And while that sounds like a hard thing, like bad news, it's actually a good thing, maybe the best and most important thing I could say to you this morning.

Prep is now behind you. But the future lies ahead. A future waiting for you to create it. The best days of your life, if that is what you choose for them to be.

I'm not saying that there won't be challenges, some hard days. There will be, I assure you. But you get to choose now. You get to choose what you call them. And if you don't shy away from them, if you're willing to embrace the challenges and struggles, if you're willing – dare I say it – to pick up your cross and follow, you can call them the best days of your life. Because they will call you to grow, sometimes force you to grow. Just as surely as Ms. Nichols did. As surely as Dr. Ochs did. As surely as Mr. Wisecarver did. As surely as a loss on baseball diamond of Wilson Lane earlier this month did, because, to paraphrase Colin Walter, sometimes we get complacent and we just have to get kicked in the teeth. Hard times, bad things happen, and they can do one of three things, as the old

saying goes: they can define us; they can destroy us, or they can strengthen us. We get to choose. Or as that great sage of Fegan-Galvin Field, the Hanley Center, and the South Room, Coach Paro would say, Guys, adversity really can be our friend, but only if we choose.

Because, Gentlemen, that is what this has been about – about growing, about being open to growth. And that part, which is the best part, is not over. But you have to choose it now – you have to choose for yourself. And that is the one thing – the most important thing – that I will ask you to do as you leave all this behind. Choose.

Don't be worry: you *won't* always make the right choice; that's a given. But if you fail to choose, you've chosen the default, and default is always the wrong choice. It is a surrender – a surrender of your will, a surrender of your intelligence, a surrender of yourself.

But if you are willing to take the risk, if you are brave enough to choose – always to have the courage to forge a path – you will become strong in it, and you will grow as a man, as a person, as a soul, as the very image and likeness of God who chose long ago, who risked long ago to create you and to love you.

Well, you've listened to me an awful lot these past four days, so I will end as tradition dictates with a poem, and like all poems it is finally a love poem, and it is for you on this too chilly day as we begin the summer. It is entitled The Summer Day by the American poet, Mary Oliver:

> Who made the world?
> Who made the swan, and the black bear?
> Who made the grasshopper?
> This grasshopper, I mean—
> the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
> the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

There it is: What is it that you plan to do with you one wild and precious life?

Well, that's really all I have to say. It's all done. As some of you have heard me say, we've only kept you here these four years so that someday I could finally kick you out, which, if you were listening carefully, I did a several minutes ago.

So, go now, and choose. Use everything you have been given here to choose, and then to choose again, and then again. But choose always in such a way that that our great King will say of you with great affection, as the old knight said of Indiana Jones in the Last Crusade, he chose wisely.

Choose to make a difference.

AMDG