FOR THE GREAT CLASS OF 2025
BACCALAUREATE
23 MAY, 2025

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Philippians 4:8

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Mr. Headmaster Glennon, Members of the Board, Esteemed Members of our Faculty and Staff, Dear Parents, and, most of all, Our Brothers of the Great Class of 2025:

You know, my Mom, who was a very wise woman, taught us that the most important thing we could possibly say was *Thank you!* I'd get home from a friend's house, or having gotten a ride, or even having collected for my newspaper route, and she'd look at me and invariably say *I hope you thanked them profusely*. I swear, I was the only five-year-old at the South Davis School Kindergarten in Orchard Park, New York, who knew precisely what the word *profusely* meant.

Well, as I said, she was a very wise woman, and as Mr. Eskow reminded us all on Wednesday, only a great fool would ignore wisdom so freely offered. So I will begin there.
Guys, most of you were able to attend the Senior Dinners this year, so what I want to say first, most of you have heard already. And that is to say simply *Thank you!* Thank you for investing yourselves in this place we call Prep for these past four years. Thank you for working hard to create this community, especially given

where we were just four short years ago, emerging from the pandemic. Thank you for claiming for yourselves and as your gift to the underclassman a sacred sense of brotherhood. Community and brotherhood do not happen by accident or coincidence; they only come to be through a deep intentionality and commitment. And this has been your gift to Prep – the gift of the Great Class of 2025. So on behalf of all of Prep – Prep today and the Prep of the future – I am proud and honored to thank you.

But my brothers, that thanks comes with a great caution. Your work is not done. Not by a long shot. In fact, it has only just begun. And I can only promise you this: it will not always be easy.

You see, as Ezekiel reminded us in the first reading, God has been hard at work these past four years. He has been stealing you away from your comfort zone. He's been chipping away at that heart of stone – that hardness, that selfishness, that egotism – that dwells in each one of us. He has been trying to fashion in you – in all of us – hearts of flesh, hearts that can love, hearts that befriend, that include, that open up. He's been trying to overthrow the idols – those false gods that hold us back – the gods that this world worships – the almighty dollar, "success," self-sufficiency, control – and trying to paint in your hearts the ikon of the one true God, the servant God who brings good news to the afflicted, who binds up the brokenhearted, who proclaims liberty to captives and release to the prisoners, who comforts those who mourn, who announces a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication by our God (Isaiah 61:1b-2). To paint an ikon, a sacred image, of that one true God in your hearts – that God who lays down his very life for his friends (John 15:13).

We see that ikon, that sacred image, in this prayer that Jesus utters the night before he dies, within hours of his betrayal and the brutal torture, humiliation, and execution that await him. It is not a prayer for himself, but for his disciples, his friends, his brothers. It is a prayer for them even though he knows that they will deny him and abandon him. In his darkest hour, he prays for them.

And what is that prayer? That they might be one – that they might really love each other the way he has loved them. That through their love for one another, through their care and affection for each other, that through their brotherhood with each other, and with him, that the world will know God's love, that the world will come

to believe that there is something much greater than the false gods, that the world will know, to paraphrase Paul Cumbo who spoke to you a few weeks ago, that the world will know that it does matter, that it really does matter.

My brothers, there are so many people in our world who don't know that they matter, that their actions matter, that their friendships and their love really do matter. And there is so much in our world that tells them that it doesn't matter, that they don't matter. But I hope – I so hope – that in your four years here at Prep you have begun to see something different, that you have begun to catch a glimmer of something so much better.

That you have been here not by accident or coincidence, nor even merely because of the typical reasons anyone ends up at this or that school, but because through it all there has been something greater at work, Someone greater calling you, summoning you to be a greater self than you otherwise would ever have been; that *magis* – that *more* – that calls us each to be and to be truly the man we want to see. That you have begun to apprehend the God who created us each from love, who created us each for love, and who created us each to love; the God who knows us each even better than we know ourselves – with all our failings and faults and shortcomings – and loves us to the very end. The God who knows his plans for us, plans for our peace, not for disaster (Jeremiah 29:11).

John Henry, Cardinal Newman, the great English theologian of the late 19th Century put it this way:

> God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall do good; I shall do His work. I shall be an angel of peace, a preacher of truth in my own place, while not intending it if I do but keep His commandments. Therefore, I will trust Him: whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him; in perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what He is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still, He knows what He is about.

My brothers, you have been here these four years for a purpose, and now you are leaving for that purpose. You may not understand it yet, but if you commit yourself to living intentionally, to loving intentionally, to being intentional – if you really commit yourself to the brotherhood that has made you one here, and not only here but where it is truly needed, especially for those who most need it – you will surely find your purpose, your passion, your joy. And as Jesus promises his disciples, that joy will live in you as his joy, and your joy will be complete (John 15:11).

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, *live* these things.

For He knows his plans for you, he does. Plans for your true peace, not for disaster. And they are beyond, far beyond, so far beyond your wildest imagination. Live them. Let them be one with you.

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