Welcome Speech - Veronica Estefani ‘25

Good evening, Mrs. Gillingham-Rivas, Mr. Coyle, Sister Taylor, members of the Board of Trustees, Mrs. Consuegra, Dr. Larrea, faculty, staff, friends, family, and most importantly, my sisters of the class of 2025 (pause). I want to thank you all for joining us here for a moment that we will remember for the rest of our lives. Today is more than a milestone, it’s a moment that is the culmination of 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, and for some of us, even 15 years of our lives at Carrollton. Years filled with laughter, learning, friendship, and growth. Every early morning, every rush to get ready, every drive to school with the windows down, every office hours, every class period, every assemble, every class meeting, every Starbucks run, every test, every midterm, every prayer, every friend we made, every moment we didn’t even know or didn’t even think was shaping us, has brought us here, to this very day. It feels like no accident that we arrive at this moment together, guided by God's grace, love, and plan, in ways we least expect it. God, whether we realize it or not, is always with us and is always giving us signs of His goodness-his presence. In Genesis, the Bible tells us a beautiful story about a man named Noah who builds an incredible ark to prepare for a terrible storm; a flood that would entrap the entire world. Instructed by God,

Noah prepares a room for two of every kind of animal, along with his family, to accompany him on this ark. The flood finally comes, and after 40 long days and nights, Noah sends out a dove to see if the storm has passed. When the dove returns to the ark, it assures Noah that peace had been restored and that all was well. That small sign from God, who through this dove communicated peace and renewal, is all Noah needs.

You see, in life, sometimes, we face our own storm. A storm that feels like too much. A storm that tests our limits, pushes us to places we didn't think we could go, and makes us question if we can stand strong. There were days we were overwhelmed, days when homework felt too much, when friendships felt distant, when the reality of leaving a place we have called home consumed us, and when we questioned if we had the strength to get through it all. There were days when the world around us sped up and made it difficult to find our place. It's no secret that high school can be hard; it's no secret that it's easy to lose ourselves along the way. But as difficult as those storms were, they were never without purpose. Amidst this seemingly undefeatable storm, sometimes, God sends us a dove. A soft, gentle reminder of His love, His presence, and His hope. Sometimes, that dove is the kind of peace we feel when we least expect it, a whisper of encouragement just when

we need it most. And there have been moments throughout our time here at Carrollton when I know that we were all touched by that dove. In moments of kindness, in simple words of affection, in unexpected gestures of care, these moments were the doves. These were the moments when we knew, without a doubt, that we were loved. These little actions and moments taught us that it's okay to struggle, to stumble, and to find ourselves, because on the other side of the storm, we would stand taller, stronger, and more whole than we were before; the storm will eventually pass.

Sometimes, though, God sends something even more special and something even more unique. Sometimes, He sends 86 other Carrollton girls, wearing plaid skirts and bright polo shirts, to help build each other up. And that's what has made our journey here so extraordinary. You have been that sign, that reminder, and that presence at seemingly the perfect moment. We've seen each other for who we really are, not just in our successes, but in how we live each day, in just showing up. We see that being us is enough. And in doing so, we've become each other's strength during the storms we face. Whether it was a late-night study session, a hug when someone felt down, or a kind word when things felt uncertain, we have been each other's doves: each other's reminder that we are not alone; we are seen and loved by

each other. In a world where so often we are taught to compete, to compare, to strive for perfection, Carrollton has taught us to simply be, together. To support one another. To help each other be the best versions of ourselves, not with judgment, but with encouragement. After reflecting on our time at Carrollton, it is easy to say that this school has become a home, and the people that fill it, a family. It is no coincidence that we begin this graduation with a mass. Anything and everything that we have built here has been forever shaped by God. God lives within every single one of us. Throughout this mass, I want you to take a moment to look around the room at the people: the life, the person, the dove, sitting to your right, to your left, behind you, or in front. Everything beyond this point is uncertain, but what is certain is that we can find each other and our Sacred Heart of Jesus at this very altar. You can find your family- your home at this altar. As I conclude this address, and as we begin this mass, reminisce on everything you've come to know here at Carrollton. Reflect on all the things we've done as a class together. Reflect on the mark we will leave behind. Reflect on who you are now and who you will become as you move on to the next chapter of your life. Reflect on the moments where you were a dove in someone's life. Reflect on the little ways others were a dove in your life. Reflect on us. I want to take a small moment,

and invite my sisters to please stand and join me in one final sacred heart prayer, together.

I am a child of the Sacred Heart. Each day dear Lord, I will love as you love, study and learn, help those who need me, be a friend to all, and make wise choices. Saint Madeleine Sophie, hear my prayer. Saint Rose Philippine, hear my prayer. Amen.

The dove comes back, in the story of Noah; it comes back. Take that as a reminder that you can always, no matter what, come back home. Please stand and join me in welcoming our celebrant, Fr. Vallee.