

## Commencement Preparatory High School

Thank you for that kind introduction.

Good afternoon, and welcome to the class of 2001, and welcome to your parents, friends, and faculty.

I know your families are proud of you. Parents, you deserve a lot of credit for these fine young men. Your hard work and unfailing support are the foundation of their success.

And for you teachers, a newsmagazine writer once said **“Teaching is not a lost art, but the regard for it is a lost tradition.”** I am sure that is not the case here. Your students, their parents, the administration and the communities from which your students come all hold you in the highest regard.

And to you gentlemen, the class of 2001: You deserve to take some of the credit for your success—after all, you were the ones who did the work.

Students, teachers, parents... You all deserve credit on this graduation day...but credit an interesting thing. The less of it we take, the more of it we get.

Abraham Lincoln said, **“There is no limit to how far you can go provided you don’t care who gets the credit.”**

By that he meant the good you do in life—the work you help others accomplish, or the goals you help others achieve—when done selflessly, does not require your signature. There will be no limit on what you offer the world if you greet life’s challenges with a willing heart and an open mind.

Many of you will head off to college this fall, and others will engage in new pursuits. In any event, you will be called on to make decisions all on your own for the first time in your life. There will days when the choices in front of you seem downright overwhelming, and you will wonder if the choices you make will be the right ones.

Don’t worry. You will make the right choices. Because your school has prepared you for the challenges of life in a country where we are free to make our own decisions.

This high school provides an exemplary education of the total person through a Catholic philosophy of life, fostering spiritual, intellectual, social, moral and physical growth.

To get to this well-earned day, you have demonstrated your commitment to those fundamental principles. And you have embraced this school’s teaching philosophy of reason, religion, and kindness. With those guide stars in front of you, your decisions cannot be wrong.

Your teachers, your counselors, and your families have been with you every step of the way to help shape your decision-making ability. With their help, you went from dependence to independence.

I want you to think about that independence and what it really means. It didn't come without a price.

Your families paid into it—and I don't mean just in tuition. They made a decision to invest in your future by willingly making sacrifices, knowing their investment in you and your future would be the right choice for the whole family.

Your teachers contributed by choosing their noble profession. Their choice may have put other, perhaps more lucrative, dreams on hold, but they wanted to invest in your dreams. It was the right choice for the society in which they live.

And you invested part of yourselves in your own future. Because you chose to succeed, you probably put some other, less lofty but more enjoyable pursuits aside. You made a commitment to yourself, to your families and to your school. You will reap the dividends of that investment for the rest of your lives.

But remember, life is not a solo event. All the choices I just mentioned are elements of your success—your families, your teachers, and yourselves, all helping you succeed. Now, the question is, where will that success lead?

President John Kennedy said, **“Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefits for everyone and greater strength for our nation.”**

Kennedy also said, **“I believe the problems of human destiny are not beyond the reach of human beings.”**

Kennedy believed in the ability of Americans to meet the challenges of the future through individual efforts directed toward a common goal.

You have achieved a milestone in your lives. You have accomplished something for yourselves today, but it is only a foundation for what you will be building for society tomorrow.

The world needs you.

How is that for a responsibility?

The world needs you.

Hunger is widespread. You will be asked to help stem its progress.

Poverty is common. You will be called on to change that condition.

Disease is decimating whole nations. Your skills and compassion will be needed to bring relief and comfort to the sick.

Homelessness haunts our cities. Your determination will be needed to drive this spectre out of society.

War is killing the innocent and dividing nations. Your leadership will be needed to bring reason and peace to a safe harbor.

Hate still finds its victims in our free society. Your faith will be called on to help bind the festering wounds of prejudice and to unite our nation's many voices into the one voice of equality.

You have it in your power to take on these challenges and build a better world. You may have heard the saying, **“No man sees so far as he who lifts another on his shoulders.”** It is true. And that is your mission from this day forth.

Go from this place and begin to achieve your destiny with the goal of lifting others so they may see a better world.

For some of you, that destiny will be medicine, for others, law. Perhaps a few of you will find satisfaction in planning cities and building new information pathways.

On that last point, let me say that information is today a critical commodity but it is not yet a universal commodity. If the future is to have any common bond tying nations and people to useful and immediate solutions, information must become the coin of the realm. Those of you who take on this challenge will be, quite literally, wiring the world for knowledge.

I'm sure there are those among you who will enjoy the challenges of scientific discovery—eradicating disease, expanding global food resources, or meeting the world's incessant need for energy. And I know some of you will choose public service or military service as a way to assure our own nation's well-being for future generations.

So much to do and so many choices.

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century writer and philosopher George Moore said it succinctly, **“The difficulty in life is the choice.”**

Your education here has opened up a world of choices—not just where to go to college or what major to choose, not even what profession to choose, but what choices you have to help others.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, St. Francis of Assisi said, **“Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received - only what you have given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.”**

From this day forward, you will be planning your life’s path. I urge you to make a part of that path a commitment to help others and to participate in the free society that so many men and women have given their lives to protect and defend.

For all of you, keep St. Francis’s words in your every action. Life is not a solo event when you have a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice and courage.”

Down in Washington, next to the Smithsonian’s Air and Space Museum on the National Mall, is a simple sculpture. It is a bronze and aluminum spire rising 80 feet up to a point surrounded by abstract stars.

The title of the sculpture is *“Ad Astra Per Aspera,”* which translates, “To the Stars Through Difficulties.”

That could be the theme of your mission in life. Setting your goals high and then striving to meet them.

It is never an easy course—if it were, the problems I mentioned would have been resolved long ago.

I know you are up to the challenges. President Kennedy, in his book *Profiles in Courage*, wrote, **“A man does what he must - in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers - and this is the basis of all human morality.”**

America needs great people, and you are the best hope not only for America but for the world. I encourage you to aspire to greatness in every challenge you accept. I urge you to encourage greatness in others, and to show them the path to greatness by your example.

90 years ago, President Woodrow Wilson had a vision for your role in America when he said:

**“I do not believe that America is securely great because she has great men in her now. America is great in proportion as she can make sure of having great men in the next generation. She is rich, that is to say, if those unborn children see the sun in a day of opportunity, see the sun when they are free to exercise their energies as they will. If they open their eyes in a land where there is no special privilege, then we shall come into new era of American greatness and American liberty.”**

You are those unborn children of whom President Wilson spoke.

You have it in your power to lift humanity to a new level, toward a brighter light, and into a better future. Your shoulders have become broader thanks to the education you received here. They will become wider still as you take on new challenges in education, as you bear the new responsibilities of citizenship in this great country, and as you open your hearts and minds in the service of the world.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., said, **“I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving. To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind, and sometimes against it—but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor.”**

Now, to the class of 2001, I commend you for your success, and I urge you to continue to pursue knowledge and understanding. Do not lie at anchor. Unfurl your sails and take to the wind. The world is waiting for you.

Congratulations, thank you and God bless this great country.