

“LIFE’S NEXT CHAPTER” UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR THE JOURNEY

Perhaps you have seen the television commercial in which a fast-talking teenager involved in a “very minor fender bender” at an “unreasonably narrow drive-through lane” tries to sweet talk his way out of trouble. Though effusive in his praise of his parents (who are reading in bed when he arrives home) for having purchased “accident forgiveness,” his luck suddenly runs out as his mother cuts him off– “Four weeks without the car.” He quickly agrees, turns around and heads off to his room. But you had to give the kid an “A” for effort! It is hilarious, and the acting is spot on. While Dad is suspicious, Mom wastes no time in meting out the punishment– she clearly read him like a book!

This past week the Cathedral hosted Commencement Exercises for two local Catholic High Schools, with another to follow next week. I dedicate this column to our graduating parishioners who have achieved this milestone and share with them in small measure their joy and pride. We are all proud of you, and so too your parents, even if they too can read you like a book! It is impossible to be present at these ceremonies without recalling my own high school days, my experience as a religion teacher in one Catholic High School or my most recent assignment in which I was privileged to serve for six years both as Superintendent of a K-12 school and pastor of the parish.

I especially witnessed in those six years the tremendous influence that teachers had upon the faith of their students and how a faithful witness to the truth spoke volumes, reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom. Many teachers do not get to experience first-hand the successes of their students later in life– instead, they trust that their hard work will prepare their students well, even if they cannot see it in the present moment. It is a delayed gratification, if it is gratification at all. More properly, it is trust. Teach with all your heart, soul mind and strength, and trust that God will do the rest. Graduation ceremonies not only marked a key moment in a young person’s life, but provided a well-deserved summer break for students and adults alike following a long year.

High School graduation is arguably the clearest point of demarcation between youth and young adulthood. Graduation is both an ending of childhood, as well as a joyous look to the future. So what words of advice would I offer to this year’s graduates including our parishioners? We all share in your joy and offer your prayerful support. And yes, we may just even remember what was going through our own minds however many years ago. Perhaps your joy is mingled with some fear and trepidation. Fear of the unknown; fear of starting over again. How many times must you start over? I’ve got news for you– a lot! That is the first lesson. Our Catholic faith offers numerous beginnings, makes provisions for hitting the spiritual “re-set” button, and is present even in our worst failures. Your faith can be your constant companion and guide, even when you feel most alone. Let it be that solid ground upon which you can land.

If you continue your formal education, please take some history courses. Our country desperately needs citizens who appreciate the past, and the valuable lessons it offers. Cicero wrote in *Orator XXXIV,120*: “*Nescire autem quid antequam natus sis acciderit, id est semper esse puerum.* (To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child.)” God has called us out of darkness of ignorance into his wonderful light. Reject ignorance. Sometimes the darkness is preferred to the light. We may be tempted to hide, to sink into the background, remain anonymous, keep our secrets. But when we make a fundamental commitment to Christ, He calls us out of the shadows into the light of truth. He does this because he sees you as precious, living stones built up into a spiritual house. Every one of you is precious in God’s eyes.

At the same time, remain mindful of your own need to seek forgiveness for your human weakness. We do not preach to others, absent of an honest reflection about our own weaknesses. Spiritual growth is painstakingly slow and includes its setbacks. Sometimes that growth comes with a dear price to pay. It is the price of our human freedom. True freedom consists not in doing whatever we want, but in doing all that we ought to do. Let us pray for the grace to respect the tremendous gift of human freedom, and not to abuse it. Our world is changing so rapidly, much more quickly than I had ever thought possible. We turn to you to help take up the mantle. Christ calls us to the freedom of being sons and daughters of God.

I offer a closing thought from Archbishop John Ireland, who once wrote about Catholic schools, but which applies also to other educational institutions: *“The proof of excellence of an institution is found in the class of students it sends forth each year to fight the battles of life.”* Increasingly, life appears as a battle, at least with respect to holding onto sacred truths in such a rapidly changing and increasingly secularized world. We pastors stand ready to accompany you on the next step in your journey. Find a good Catholic Newman club at a college or university or a nearby parish with which you can connect while in college. If you are heading into the workforce, take your knowledge and bring light to wherever you spend your days and do so joyfully and confidently. Our prayers and promise of support will remain with you wherever God may lead you.

- As a way of saying Thank You, I wish to invite all parishioners who have volunteered this past year in any way at this parish to join the Cathedral Staff for **Volunteer Appreciation Sunday** on **June 24th** following the 10:00 a.m. Mass. We’ll have a tent will on the lawn behind the sacristy to celebrate. More information to follow.
- I begged intercession at the Shrine of St. Patrick, from the saint who evangelized the Emerald Isle sixteen centuries ago. Irish citizens overwhelmingly voted to abolish the 8th amendment that provided legal protection for the unborn.: “The result of Friday’s referendum on the Eighth Amendment confirms that we are living in a new time and a changed culture for Ireland,” **Armagh’s Archbishop Eamon Martin** said, adding– “For the Church it is indeed a missionary time, a time for new evangelization.” Indeed, it is!
- **Cardinal-designate Luis Ladaria**, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith affirmed (once again) the definitive nature of Pope John Paul II’s 1994 teaching on **male-only priesthood**. This teaching, the CDF prefect said, is “a truth belonging to the deposit of faith.” His reaffirmation was widely interpreted as a response to another Cardinal who seemingly called its definitive nature into question, opining that only an Ecumenical Council could declare the matter closed.
- Pope Francis met with a delegation from the World Federation of the **Catholic Medical Association**, calling their work “a particular form of human solidarity and Christian witness.” He also told the doctors that in this role, “you are called upon to affirm the centrality of the patient as a person and his dignity with his inalienable rights, primarily the right to life.”

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector