

Good evening honoured guests, Reverend Father, Reverend Sister, staff, faculty, parents, family members and fellow graduates. Welcome to the Graduation ceremony for the class of 2010.

Les Brown believes that “ life is a journey, often difficult and sometimes incredibly cruel, but we are well equipped for it, if only we tap into our talents and gifts, and allow them to blossom.” **Our talents and our gifts are the light that shines through Holy Cross.** It is hard to believe, that tonight, this chapter of our story is coming to an end that we are here to celebrate and to reap the benefits of our talents and our gifts. We have worked for these talents and gifts. They did not come naturally. We watched them struggle, we then watched them grow, and finally we watched them bloom. These talents have been brought forward into the light.

Now, that I am in, this light, I can tell you, I do not like talking about myself very much. I have grappled with why you chose me. **Why did you do this to me?** I am incredibly humbled to be standing here, to have been chosen by you as your valedictorian. That being said, this has been one of **the** most challenging speeches, one of the most challenging things that I have ever had to write. It has been quite a struggle actually. I had to dig deep to understand why I found it so difficult to speak

on behalf of you, my classmates. In this soul searching I realized the heart felt honour you have given me. This is an honour, that could have gone to any number of different people. **This class, is made up of exceptional people, all in your own areas.** You are a diverse class, full of athletes, artists, talented people. No one person stands above the crowd. I decided that I'd share a little bit of my story with you, and I think it is a story many of us have in common, but we do not realize it.

During elementary school I was not overly popular and I only had a few friends. This is common with a number of us. As we became seniors in school, we had made different choices, and we found those friendships did not hold. I was **not** one to usually follow the crowd. I found I was teased a lot because I attended Mass regularly, which is something I believed strongly about, and still believe strongly in. Throughout high school I made new friends. Again, the friendships varied, as did our interests. New challenges came along. I, was not one to go to many parties. But when I did get invited, my friends accepted me for who I was, with my root beer! They understood that I was not going to change who I was. I feel that a number of you have that same trait, a sense of knowing who you are. I maintained my strong devotion to my faith, as a number of you have. I took to heart " Christ: The light of our world " which was our school's theme this year.

As you may recall, I ran for head girl last year, which was a huge decision for me. I almost did not run, **because I was afraid of failure**. I am sure there are many of you who have felt the same way. I did not get elected head girl, but, I learned without realizing at the time, that I made a difference in others lives. The little things we do in life, can make a difference for others.

That little smile you give a person in a short moment can change a person's life. I was once told a story about a boy named Kyle who was perceived by many as being a nerd. One day he was seen going home from school carrying all his books from his locker, and was knocked over by a bunch of guys teasing him. The boy who witnessed this saw such powerful sadness in his eyes that he went over to help him. Kyle was not someone he would normally find himself friends with, as Kyle was a bit of a nerd and had gone to private school. But, they got to know each other and became close friends throughout high school. Come graduation day, Kyle was chosen valedictorian. As he told his speech, he began to share the story of the day they had met. He had planned to kill himself over the weekend, and he had emptied his locker out so his mother would not have to do it later. He looked hard at his friend and gave him a little smile and told his class mates how thankful he was that his friend had saved his life. His friend was in shock, and looked over at Kyle's parents who were looking at him, giving him that same grateful smile. Kyle was

saved because of a small gesture, that simple smile and that new friendship. The lesson here, is to recognize that we are not alone. Never underestimate the power of your actions. With one small gesture you can change a person's life. For better or for worse. God puts us all in each other's lives to impact one another in some way.

Look for God's light, in each other.

As we have grown up we have matured from embers into **brightly burning lights**. This is what we are able to do as a result of the gifts our parents and teachers gave us. The importance of this, is that Christ's light has no way of being seen in the world, except through us. We have become Christ's light to others. We have had many people help us to get here, and we must now carry this through to the next chapter of our story.

We have certainly had some memorable moments to build upon. Who can forget: sports events, lunches, band trips, pep rallies. Being a member of the Holy Cross Crusaders has been an honour. We as the graduating class of 2010 have left a mark on our community. Our graduation class is, a diverse group of people. We are a class of strength and wisdom. We are made up of different personalities and talents. But one thing we all have in common is how we give back to the community. Our senior football team, who were EOSSA champs for the first time, were not only

champions on the field but were also champions when they allowed us to weigh them, raising money for the Christmas baskets. Each year our girls and guys basketball teams raise funds for cancer research through the Peter Carty memorial and Paul Halligan Classic events. Through CICS we have had Think Fasts and food drives at Thanksgiving and Christmas. We give back to our community. Whatever our talents and gifts have been, whether it was being on the Improv Team, being a member of the band, sports teams or whether you were part of the many plays. Tonight these diverse talents have come together and tonight we stand united as we graduate.

The gifts that are within us have given us the ability to grow and take risks. These gifts were fostered by a significant number of people, people we need to pay tribute to and thank. Our thanks and appreciation must go to Mr. Walsh, Mrs. Teves and Ms. Daniel, who always kept us safe and provided order to our lives. The staff, for teaching us about how important our education is. For teachers like Mrs. McConaghy that spend countless hours in their classrooms helping students. And for those teachers like Mr. Orser who may occasionally turn bright red to the point where their veins are close to bursting. We thank you for the passion you have for your job. The caretakers, especially Mr. Rick Thompson who was a strong role model for our behaviour in the school. Our fellow classmates, for showing us

the importance of friendship in our lives. And lastly, our parents, truly the light in our lives. You never hesitated, you never gave up hope for any of us, you realized that every story begins with a single, gentle, word. And so the foundation of our education continued day by day painfully extending further .Sometimes you encouraged us to run, and other times you needed to hold in the reins – yet all the while you encouraged us relentlessly forward, finishing here tonight ... our graduation ceremony. We are grateful and privileged to have had your valuable input in our lives – the true value thereof we may only fully comprehend in the years still to come.

As we continue our story, we have found that those friends we had lost during the years have returned. There is mutual respect for each other. We have had many experiences during high school that are valuable. We have seen how actions can influence others without even realizing it. We have learned to never be afraid to fail. As we continue our own individual stories... let us not forget what our first teacher of literature told us.

Dr. Seuss once said:

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You're on your own. And you know what you know.

You are the guy who'll decide where to go.

So wherever it is you decide to go, whether it is to university, college, a victory lap, or to the real world of work ... may this fabulous journey keep you believing in your dreams. And as you strive for those dreams may you never forget who you are. Once a Crusader, always a Crusader.

Thank you. Good night and God Bless.

