**COMMENCEMENT CELEBRATION ADDRESS**

**May 16, 2021**

Dear Class of 2020,

Exactly one year ago today, we held a virtual commencement ceremony for you in the Abbey Church. I remember how strange it was to celebrate your accomplishments during your years on the Hilltop…only to not have you on the Hilltop to celebrate. We promised that we would bring you back to your home to give you the opportunity to walk across this platform, in front of (a few) family/friends just as thousands of Saint Anselm alumni have done. While it has taken longer than any of us could have imagined when you departed campus on March 15, 2020, I am so pleased that we could deliver on this promise. Welcome home!

I have a special place in my heart for your class. You taught me, a new President and new to the Hilltop, how to live as part of a community in this place. All of the joys, the traditions, the activities, the classes, and relationships that undergird the Saint Anselm experience. As if this wasn’t enough, by the end of the year, you taught me resilience, patience, kindness, and grace. Instead of focusing on what was taken away from you, you focused on what was given to you on the Hilltop as you launched into careers, graduate school, or service to others or to the nation.

Back one year ago today, I spoke to you (virtually) about five things to remember as you make your way through life. If you have trouble remembering what the five things were, don’t worry: you won’t have to take a pop quiz as your final, final exam! But with your permission, I share these with you again, not because I think they answer all of the questions of life but because, well, they are worth repeating. And since Plato says all knowledge is recollection, think of it knowing this…again. So here goes.

1. Remember: Be thankful every day, even on the bad ones.
   1. At this moment particularly, take the time to thank your parents, guardians, and family. You simply would not be at this point without their support and love.
   2. But you should be thankful not just when people do things for us or give us stuff. Why?
   3. Everything we have is a gift and, as a gift, we should give back generously and freely. Being thankful reminds us of this lesson.
   4. You will never fully know the sacrifices your parents, teachers, mentors, doctors, others, made for the sake of your well-being. You can never, ever pay them back. Just be thankful. And make sure you say it often.
2. Remember: You are not the center of the universe.
   1. I have a friend who wakes up every morning and prays that God will give him the strength to live his live without the assumption that he is the center of the universe.
   2. This is a hard prayer since the easiest assumption, given the way we experience the world, is that everything revolves around us. Literally.
   3. Except that if doesn’t. But the only way we can ever know this is through reflection on our experience. This is the beginning of education and there is a close affinity to being educated and being humble.
   4. After all, wasn’t it another Greek philosopher, Socrates, who said that if he was the wisest man in the world as some claimed, it was only because he knew that he wasn’t?
   5. 99% of the world doesn’t care about you or the decisions you make. That’s OK. The challenge is: will you leave yourself behind and care about those 99% anyway?
3. Remember: Being smart is less important than being compassionate and kind.
   1. I really hope this is a lesson that resonates more with you now after a year of “life” than it did a year ago.
   2. If you wish to live and work as part of a community rather than as a hermit, whether that be a family, a group of roommates, or a company, being kind and compassionate is a non-negotiable.
   3. As much as I admire really smart people, I know a few that I would prefer not to live with. Being smart does not give you a pass to treat others badly. While it might advance your career or your wealth, it will cost you your soul.
   4. Relationships are built on simple lessons you learned in kindergarten. Be kind. Help others. If someone falls down, help them up even if it means you lose the race.
4. Remember: The mark of every great life is failure and yes, this applies to your life
   1. Yes, the last 15 months have not been fun or easy. It is easy to hold a “pity me” party about what has happened to you, what you have missed, what you have lost. It would so easy to roll over and watch yet another episode of “The Office.”
   2. You are doing the best you can to land on your feet and find your next big adventure.
   3. I can guarantee you that you will make mistakes and you will fail. As a result, you will feel pain and you will not be happy.
   4. What will be your response? You can hate yourself more for failing or you can realize that St. A’s made you a lifelong learner. So learn! Pick yourself up and learn.
5. Remember: In the end, there are but thing things that last: faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love (I stole this from St. Paul).
   1. This is where Plato could be right. Just because we have faith in God or a higher power doesn’t mean we fully understand what faith is.
   2. Just because we hope for the future doesn’t mean that we grasp the breadth and depth of hope.
   3. And just because we love someone or someone loves us do we understand the transformative power of love.
   4. Throughout the course of your life, you will be tempted to believe and hope for and love all sorts of things. Beware.
   5. Remember, your St. A’s experience has taught you to figure what is worth believing in, hoping for, and loving…and what is not.
   6. And no matter how much you have faith, how much you hope for, and how much you love, it will never be too much. Faith, hope and love are boundless.

So there you have it: the five things I hope you recall as you continue your life as a proud alum of Saint Anselm College. You have the knowledge: your job is to just to remember it and to allow others and new situations to assist you in recalling it. Plato would be so happy.

Before I conclude, I want to give a shout out to two people and a team. Amanda Conger, where are you? Amanda won the 2020 Hockey Humanitarian Award just after the pandemic struck. She selflessly donated a kidney to Cameron Ouellette, a local man she met in her native Vermont as an intern. She found out she was a donor match and never waived. If ever there was definition of Anselmian, Amanda would be right up there with…. Well, St. Anselm. Thank you, Amanda.

I also want to say thank you to Fr. Benet Phillips, OSB, for his incredible work to plan this event today along with the entire Alumni Affairs team. Fr. Benet planned my inauguration in 2019 (about 10 years ago) and I knew he was the one to pull this off today. Thank you, Benet, to you and the entire Alumni Affairs team for making this day so special to such a special group of newly minted alumni.

Finally, I hope you have discovered this year that though you away from the Hilltop, you always have the Hilltop with you. You have made us proud as students; you will make us proud as alums. May the Holy Spirit of love and wisdom continue to fill you each day to be a light for a weary world. As it has been for these past four plus one years, so it will be in the future.