

2006 VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

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Four years. Can you believe how quickly they have flown by? And yet, my classmates of 2006, how far have you come in just that short amount of time? I ask you to think back to your first few days at Holy Cross. Can you remember pulling onto campus for the first time and being swarmed by Orientation Leaders trying to help you move your belongings up to your room? Can you remember meeting your roommate, your neighbors, and your RA, all while trying to avoid being seen with your parents? Think back to Dean Levine issuing her simple and yet irrefutable counsel: “Go to all your classes!”. Recall attending the candlelit memorial service, commemorating the passing of one year since the September 11th attacks. It is my sincere hope today that all of you, upon looking back, see tremendous growth that has taken place within yourself since that time.

Each and every one of us has had our own experiences at Holy Cross. Some of us have been fortunate to meet our best friends, our future business partners, and even our future wives and husbands. Many of us have experienced considerable hardships, losing friends and loved ones, being the objects of hate, or having our trust betrayed by those closest to us. Some may even feel they are leaving Holy Cross having less than what they entered with. However, regardless of our individual endeavors over these four years, we have all been exposed to one truth that each of us must carry with us now and for the rest of our lives. And it is this: An awareness of our greater responsibility and duty within the world as a whole. No Jesuit education would be complete without this

awareness. Peter Maurin, one of the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement during the Great Depression of the 1930's, summed this up very nicely: "Whatever you have is a gift to offer others...The people who do all the thinking never act, and the people who do all the acting never think." At Holy Cross, we have been among the fortunate few who have been given the tools both to act and to think. We have received a tremendous gift in our Jesuit education, and let us offer its fruit to others for the rest of our lives. I ask each one of you here today to pledge with me that we *can* and we *will*.

Each one of us is called to share this gift in a unique way. Nearly every member of this class sitting in front of me today has begun to give their gift in some way over the last four years. Maybe you have worked at homeless shelters and tutored inner-city children through the SPUD program. Maybe you have spent your spring breaks building houses in West Virginia through the Appalachia Service Project or Habitat for Humanity. Maybe you have worked with the relief effort for Hurricane Katrina. But four years is a very short time. If we can accomplish so much as college students, think of what we can accomplish as doctors, lawyers, social workers, volunteers for the Jesuit Volunteer Corps or Teach for America, businessmen and women, and as mothers and fathers. This is our time to accept the responsibility we have been given. Our commitment to others has not ended now that we have graduated, but rather it is just taking its fullest form.

And as I'm sure many of you have seen, this is a world that needs us, and all that we can give. I have seen it countless times in my own experiences. I have been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to work for 3 years at a homeless shelter in inner-city Worcester called the Mustard Seed. I recall once meeting a young boy who had been diagnosed with Type I or Childhood Diabetes, a serious but easily manageable disease

given access to proper care. Being uninsured, this boy was denied such care. He was not expected to live past the age of 10. Another homeless man I had the chance to meet was born and raised in my hometown of Holden, MA. While he was in high school, his parents were killed in a tragic accident, and since that time he has been living in the streets of Worcester, unable to find work despite many attempts. And I have seen so many similar situations working in Appalachia, and at hospitals and nursing homes. As graduates of Holy Cross, will we allow this to occur in our own country, in our own city? And this is not to mention the extremes of poverty that many of us have experienced in immersion programs in Jamaica, Africa, and Haiti. If one thing has become clear to me, it is that so little separates us from these people. The great Christian writer Thomas Merton came to the same realization when he described an experience as follows: ““At the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people...that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers.” No injustice is alien to us, and the world is now our responsibility.

These last four years have given us the tools to live up to our responsibility. Let us now go out into the world, and share this gift we have received. While we may be moving on to new pursuits, let us keep Holy Cross with us in our thoughts and in our actions. To quote a famous Irish proverb “Leave the ashes, but take the fire.” I challenge every one of you here today, regardless of your calling, to make your lives an example of the Jesuit tradition and to keep the fire of Holy Cross alive in the world.