

*Address to the Graduates*

*May 27, 2023*

I was once challenged to name the original rock and roller. While considering Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Elvis, I glanced at the sculpture on my desk and replied: “Sisyphus.” In Greek Mythology, Sisyphus was punished by the gods who forced him to roll an immense rock up a hill, only for it to roll down again every time he neared the top. He was expected to repeat this action for eternity. He was definitely the original rock and roller!

Sisyphus symbolizes how some people approach their jobs and their lives. In today’s world, some see life as hopeless, laborious, and repetitious. Every obstacle leads to another without an opportunity to celebrate its completion before another task emerges. Perhaps you have felt that way as a student, too. After finishing an essay, practice, activity, rehearsal, test or project, another deadline looms ahead.

But that belies living a life of meaning. Mark Twain wrote: “Challenges make life interesting, however, overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.”

Nesta Erskine added: “To be able to enjoy the pleasure of a descent from a mountaintop, something should take you to the top of the mountain in the first place. Your work – the roll of the rock takes you to the mountaintop.”

One way to avoid Sisyphus’ fate is by focusing beyond the task at hand and toward something deeper. Embracing the sixteen Franciscan Virtues can be a foundation. It helps one to identify what is important in life beyond monotonous chores. It allows us to meet obligations with perspective. We can determine our motivation-whether it is integrity, charity, service, brotherhood, or any combination of all of them.

When I was a senior in high school, I read the book Ball Four by baseball pitcher Jim Bouton. I have forgotten most of it, except his last, poignant line: “You spend a good deal of your life gripping a baseball, and it turns out it was the other way around.” Those words inspired my message for you today. That sculpture of Sisyphus has remained on my desk for years, not as a symbol of hopelessness and despair, but of perseverance and grit. So, be like Sisyphus; but instead of pushing the boulder, have the boulder push you. Let every struggle and challenge you face motivate you to be more prayerful, compassionate, accepting, grateful, humble, faithful, and joyful. Successfully completing tasks only demonstrates your excellence; accomplishing them in a Franciscan way reveals your goodness.

So, when you tell people “That’s how I roll,” remember Sisyphus. Don’t just embrace your faith, let your faith embrace you. Don’t just hold on to brotherhood; let brotherhood hold on to you. After spending your high school life gripping Franciscan virtues, now allow the virtues to grip you. As you roll the rocks of your life uphill, those virtues will sustain, guide, and protect you for eternity.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, our friars, faculty and staff, we congratulate the class of 2023 and send you forth with our love to rock and roll!

*Thomas Gamba*

