

Nicholas Capaldo  
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Valedictory

Fr. Tony, Fr. Chris, Mrs. Nearhood, members of the education commission, Mrs. Reith, faculty, parents, mom and dad, friends, and classmates, welcome to this culmination of the week's celebratory events in our official graduation ceremony, and this final celebration together as our graduating high school class. I thank you, on behalf of the class of 2010, for being here to mark this special event.

While the valedictory is traditionally used to focus on the future, I would like to seize this opportunity to express my own appreciation to this class. Each one of you has been blessed with individual talents and with individual characters. All of you have brought something special to every day, and many of us have indeed known each other since preschool here. In just those things, I have felt and shared in the gift of your energy and character in each day, and I have really appreciated the camaraderie that you brought to our lives as a close-knit class. Thank you for that. I appreciated the opportunity to begin to grow into my own with all of you.

I know that many of us have our eyes turned with excitement toward the college plans of our future. And we have a right to be excited. For many, college is the next big thing. It will be filled with new friends and new opportunities to pursue and develop our interests and our character. It's a time of many thrilling adventures – and a time of many lingering uncertainties. As much as the new transitions of college do – and should – stimulate and kindle us, that change is the thing that gives us the second thoughts, the cold feet. Let's face it – as human beings, a

need for familiarity is crucial, and often the “newness” of college lends a thin veil of doubt over our anticipation.

So, where do we go for the security and the confidence to be ourselves?

In my humble opinion, that’s why society regards college as a rite-of-passage. It’s where we learn the challenge and the value of independence. We have to trust and rely more than ever on ourselves. We have to learn to love and care for ourselves as we continue to grow day-by-day.

Therein lies the substance of this struggle. Where does that belief in one’s self, that love of self, that ever-renewable security, derive? Well, it comes from the friends with which we surround ourselves. It comes from the teachers who have given us excellent guidance so far to bring out the best in us, and from those who will continue to shape and direct our minds and beings. But ultimately, the definitive source and the best place to look for that love of self – is the God who knew perfectly every twist and fold of us, before we were even born. When it comes to *really* knowing what makes us tick and where our hearts are, I think He definitely has dibs on the top spot.

That’s only the beginning of the story, though. Besides the new opportunities and responsibilities that college presents, in the future we will begin to assume the opportunities and responsibilities of American citizenship. We will soon be new voters, while some of us may become active in political office. No matter what your politics are, I’m sure we can all agree that

these times present some of the most pressing issues that our nation has seen thus far. Our country is currently witnessing world issues of immigration reform, the economy, and terrorism – not to mention fixing the Gulf oil spill. There is one certainty, though – class of 2010, we are the new voices of America's future.

Finally, to the class of 2010, as much as we have accomplished a great deal, together and as individuals, the refreshing beauty of this whole process is that we can still see ourselves as young children in the beginning of the process of learning to become functioning and reasoning adults. We are certainly all at different points on that journey, but all we have witnessed and experienced, and all the lessons we have learned, are only a prelude to true, independent life. The real substance of our lives, the beginning of living out the unique “you,” begins now. And we've got quite a journey ahead. The challenges we face will become much greater and much more pressing. But we have risen to the occasion so far – our presence at this ceremony is proof of that. Who is to say that we can't do that again, as college students, as intellectuals, as professionals, as spouses and parents? As much as we really don't *know* what lies ahead for any of us, we can be certain that every day, every reward for our efforts, will become still more precious to us than those before, and that life will be more enriching than we have yet imagined. In a truer sense than ever before, we are all on the threshold of starting to live full, true, and rewarding lives, wherever God may take us.

May God bless and keep us always. And may He always help us to remember that today, more than ever, is a new day, the first day of the rest of our lives.