

Good evening family, friends, faculty, staff, Christian Brothers Administration, and fellow classmates.

My name is Mary Melarkey and I am speaking to you tonight as the Valedictorian of the Christian Brothers Class of 2020.

I know that every member of the Class of 2020 has worked incredibly hard to reach this point in our lives, and I am truly honored to be the class' representative speaking on all our accomplishments. I would like everyone to take a moment to recognize that **WE MADE IT!!** We have faced the dangerous serpents of finals, passed through the raging waters of college applications, avoided the dreaded monster—peer pressure, defeated the great dragon of Advanced Placement exams, and we even won holy bowl!

I would like to express for my classmates and myself the heartfelt gratitude we have for our families, friends, teachers, mentors, and staff. Thank you, all of you, for the support and encouragement you've given us over the years. We know we wouldn't be the people we are today without you and your love.

I don't know about all of you, but I've had a **tremendous** amount of free time recently, and I've been using some of this time to think about our future and where we're going. The conclusion I've reached is that we don't truly know what's going to transpire over the next few months, much less the next few years. Our parents don't know; our teachers don't know; no one on earth really knows what will happen next. The world is changing much too rapidly for anyone to have anywhere close to an accurate idea of what our planet is going to be like 100 years, 50 years, or even 10 years down the road, but I don't believe this is **necessarily** a bad thing. Our class is at a tipping point that will define life as we know it for untold generations to come. We don't know what the future will look like because the world is drastically different now than it has **ever** been, but this means our future is **wide open to possibility**.

I want everyone to take a moment and think about what your ideal life would be like for yourself, your families, and your friends. Once you have this image, think about what **we** could do to make this picture a reality. Think about what has happened in the past four months – at how quickly the pollution levels in our soil, water, and air have decreased. What new technology can we create, what policies could we write, which movement could we start? If we take advantage of this unique moment in time, we can shape our city, country and even our world into the one that **we want it to be**.

Who is more prepared than us to take this leap into innovation and change? Before we've even reached adulthood, we lived through 9/11, earthquakes, droughts, fires, and now are in the midst of a global pandemic. After all, anyone who's survived Mr. Eckel's explosions with all their limbs intact is ready to take on the world. The horizon may appear dark and gray **right now**, but it takes **drastic circumstances to**

bring about drastic change. We have all walked through fire to get to where we are today, and that means we won't give up when the road ahead looks difficult or a world-altering catastrophe shakes everyone else to the ground. We, the members of the Class of 2020, are ready to take on the world and all of its challenges.

This brings me to something else I've been thinking about. What is humanity? How did a species without claws or armor or sharp teeth reach the top of nature's hierarchy? On a planet with lions, polar bears, tigers, wolves, sharks and so many other dangerous creatures that has been no easy feat. Some people believe humans are the "superior species" because we make tools or walk upright or have larger brains or have opposable thumbs. But I don't think any of those traits are important when compared to the true **pinnacle** of human brilliance, our great capacity for compassion.

Ever since humans first emerged on our planet, we have worked together to create things greater and more important than our individual selves. Sometimes we make mistakes; sometimes we stumble and fall; and sometimes we fail. but there are always those with the spirit to fight for what's right, to lift our neighbors up and stand together rather than scatter apart.

This compassion is what I love most about Christian Brothers. I've see it in the way the lasallian youth club connects with the children of oakridge elementary, in the teachers who spend hours of their own time helping students during lunch and afterschool, in the people smiling in the hallways just to make others' days a little brighter, and the way our school isn't divided, varsity athletes applauding at choir concerts, bookworms cheering at soccer games, artists shouting at the academic decathlon. We are taught **every** person, no matter their gender, ethnicity, sexuality, social status, age, or other arbitrary characteristic, is deserving of kindness. We are taught to work towards and build a world that is better for all persons; we are shown that if we work together and "Leave to Serve", we **will** succeed.

It is this unique trait of humanity – compassion – that is so highly valued and strongly nurtured at christian brothers that will enable us as a class and individuals to do amazing things. We, the Class of 2020, are ready to go out into the world and forge the shining future we believe in, because we are intelligent, we are passionate, we are strong, and most importantly, we are kind. All of us graduating today possess the Christian Brothers spirit of service, perseverance, adaptability, and compassion that will provide us with the strength to leave and change the world.

Class of 2020 let's make our mark, together!