

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, I stand before you with a heart filled with gratitude and pride as I address the Class of 2023. It seems like just yesterday that I graduated from Christian Brothers High School, but the truth is, it has been twenty years since that significant milestone in my life. Back then, I was a seventeen-year-old, with shabby hair driving a 1989 Oldmobile Cutlass, I had just found my first love and I was embarking on a journey to UC Davis to study religion, filled with youthful curiosity and excitement. It's funny that you chose Coldplay in your senior video as that song came out in July 2000 and I still have a CDR that album with a handmade cover made by member of the class of 2004. As I reminisce about those days, I realize how much I have grown and learned since then.

If someone had told me back then that I would be standing here today as the Interim Principal, giving a speech to the last class I taught before transitioning into administration, I would have found it hard to believe. Yet, here we are, and I couldn't be prouder of the Class of 2023 and all that you have achieved.

As a teacher, I used to begin our journey together in Sophomore religion by challenging my students to create a self-portrait. It was not just any ordinary self-portrait; it was an opportunity for them to reflect deeply on their true selves, as perceived by God, their parents, and those who knew them at their best and worst. It was a task that intentionally pushed the boundaries of self-awareness, as I believed that a genuine understanding of oneself is the foundation of wisdom.

However, the journey of self-discovery is an ongoing one. Even now, I acknowledge that I have much more to learn about myself. We continue to grow and evolve throughout our lives, although the scope for radical change may narrow with time. You, on the other hand, are at an age where the potential for transformation is vast. Fortunately, I trust that you have been surrounded by individuals who have provided you with guidance and insights into who you are as valued members of this community. These signals, whether they were words of encouragement, honest critiques, or moments of profound vulnerability, have all contributed to your growth, urging you to embrace the unique gifts bestowed upon you by the grace of God, while challenging you to overcome any unhealthy inclinations that may reside within.

Today, I stand here in the presence of 284 students and approximately 72 teachers, reflecting on the countless relationships that have flourished within the walls of Christian Brothers High School. Over the course of four years, graduates like you have forged at least 15,336 unique

connections with your teachers. These relationships have undoubtedly been marked by tensions arising from the expectations of teachers, the abilities of students, and the desires of parents and families, especially during the challenging times imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Speaking of which, let us pause for a moment to reflect on the various ways in which COVID has affected us all, some more profoundly than others.

When we speak of our mission to prepare students for college and life, we are providing you with a collection of experiences that equip you precisely for that purpose. Along this journey, you have encountered triumphs and disappointments, successes, and failures. One of the invaluable aspects of the CB experience, in my belief, lies in reminding students and families that, during challenging moments, you are never alone. Support is always available, be it from your teachers, counselors, deans, our administrative team, or each other. I encourage you to seek out this support as you continue to grow, pushing yourselves beyond your comfort zones and reaching towards new horizons. School was never meant to be easy, but we hope that earning your diploma has been an attainable goal. Most importantly, our aspiration is that after four years of preparation, whatever lies ahead becomes more accessible, your goals within closer reach, and your self-knowledge profound enough to make the best decisions as you embrace the gift of added freedom that comes with college life.

Allow me to transport you back to 1999, to a classroom where Mr. English taught his Accelerated World History class. Even in the twilight of his career, Mr. English was not one to adopt the latest fads and teaching methods. Although, I do remember writing a song called, 'Cronus Was a Titan' in our study of Ancient Greek Religion. However, there was something about the way he carried himself that made each class period feel like the most important event in your life at that time. He had an uncanny ability to connect with students, making them feel seen and understood. Like any exceptional teacher, his class was challenging, pushing you to stretch your intellectual boundaries and unlock untapped potential. I recall the tension within myself, torn between retreating to what was comfortable and embracing the growth that came from embracing challenges.

It is this beautiful tension that exists at your age. There are individuals in your life - friends, family, mentors, pastors, and teachers - who have known and loved you since you were first called "peanut," "princess," or "cookie." These individuals care for you in ways that transcend ordinary understanding. Sometimes, their knowledge of who you are may clash or create tension with your own desires and will. I encourage you to open yourselves to the wisdom of those who love you, even when their words may initially feel unwelcome to your current spirit. Be mindful of when the excitement surrounding your immense potential obscures the true essence of who God calls you to be and how God calls you to act. In identifying God as the

source of our very existence, we find ourselves blessed to exist in this delicate equilibrium between longing and fulfillment.

The person you are today is a result of the history you have lived, the relationships you have nurtured, and the consciousness you have cultivated. Amidst the excitement of life, take moments of stillness and reflection. As Psalm 46:10 reminds us, in those moments of pause, we come to know God, and in the quiet wisdom of contemplation, we find truth. In the hallways of my upbringing, my parents hung a famous drawing of a young boy, accompanied by the words, "I know I'm somebody because God doesn't make junk." That sentiment encapsulates what I wish to convey to you today. Love yourselves and serve others. Rise up today, tomorrow, and forever, embracing the worth that has been bestowed upon you by your Creator.

Thank you, and congratulations, Class of 2023. May your journey ahead be filled with growth, self-discovery, and the realization of your true potential.