

## Valedictorian Speech – Ryan Dempsey '13

Welcome friends, family, faculty, and Christian Brothers graduating class of 2013. I feel privileged to stand before the students and faculty of the 51<sup>st</sup> most challenging private high school in the nation, as ranked by the Washington Post.

I think most of us attending school here would agree with the Washington Post's assessment that our high school journey has been challenging. Without question, we have been challenged academically: math, science, history; or how about Español, Francias or Deutsche? To all of our teachers who challenged us: Gracias, Merci, und Danke schoen. There have also been challenges beyond academia: finding our way in a new environment, making new friends, and discovering the best way to interact with the faculty.

Imagine walking into World History as a freshman to a teacher dressed in a lovely, albeit ill-fitting, blue chiffon cocktail dress. Pretty odd to see a teacher in lovely evening wear on my first day of school, especially when it was Mr. English. Of course it all makes sense, like most things do, when put into context. He issued a challenge the spring before: if all of the AP World History students passed the AP test, Mr. English promised to wear a pretty dress to school. The students of Christian Brothers High School rose to that challenge.

There is a talented pool of teachers at Christian Brothers High School who continually seeks to identify each of our talents and encourages each of us to reach our potential. Sometimes the potential is unknown to us until we are challenged to discover it within ourselves. Teachers like Mr. Slabbinck and Sra. Mundo are exceptional in their ability to coach talent from even the shyest among us. They challenge us with gentle coaxing and kind encouragement, as one would expect from Lasallian educators. Others come up with creative ways to keep the students involved. Those who had Mr. Coyner for Computer Science will remember the challenge of computer programming, but will also remember the reward of pre-lunch Hot Pockets, the food of a true programmer. And you could always count on Mrs. Coyner, and those like her, to lend you a couple bucks if you forgot to bring money for lunch.

We students of Christian Brothers High School are well practiced on a variety of challenges. The most common challenges are in the categories of athletics, performing arts, and academics. However, there are also social, environmental, and faith challenges we face everyday. The solutions to these challenges are not always intuitive or clear. The measure of our character will determine how each of us faces these particular challenges over the course of our lives. However, having attended Christian Brother's High School, we have had a remarkable four-year experience, a solid foundation on which to base a compassionate, moral, and hopefully generous response.

We now embark upon the next chapter, the next verse, the next act of our lives. Let's seek out challenges, for without challenges, there are no goals; without goals, there are no accomplishments; and without accomplishments, we are not likely ever to realize our full potential. Without challenges we cannot lead the lives we were intended to lead. We are each capable of greatness and I am hopeful we have learned that with hard work, fortitude, and perseverance, no challenge is insurmountable.

As we graduate from Christian Brothers, we emerge from childhood as young adults who understand the meaning of responsibility. We have responsibilities to our family, our friends, our community, and our faith. For some of us, responsibility means having a job or internship; to others it may mean being a responsible driver or older sibling, tutor, or mentor. Regardless of the experience, I believe we have all gained a respectable understanding of the weight of responsibility. As we embark on the next chapter of our lives, we should continue to reflect on the challenges we faced during our time at Christian Brothers. Though most of us will remember the great times while the challenges fade in our memories, these challenges have made us who we are today and will continue to shape us for the rest of our lives. Thank you and good night.

Saludatory address  
Alex Daly '13

I've been put in somewhat of an odd place in being given the honor to speak before you this evening. I'd gone through several ideas and written as many speeches before I decided to use this last opportunity to speak to my class in a way that might prove to be memorable. For the past several years, I've had the privilege of sharing with all of you several stories that you've told me have changed the way you thought about things. And this compliment has always struck me as difficult to accept, because it wasn't until the first day of high school that anyone my age had told me that *anything* I say is worth listening to. But all of you listened, and kept listening, and honored me with the opportunity to have you listen to me one final time.

So I'd like to start by telling you a bit about myself that you might not have known before. I can start by saying, with a fair amount of certainty, that I'm one of the most insecure people I know. I have frequent feelings of embarrassment, and of insignificance, and of expendability. And I've had these feelings for a majority of my life. I don't tell you this to generate concern or to ask for your pity; I tell you this to let you know that I struggle with the same feelings that trouble all of us occasionally. And high school is a time in our lives when these feelings can become exaggerated and overwhelming, because we're around people who might give the appearance of having solved all the issues of life. There was a joke that started freshman year that on any day I'd be absent from school I would be preoccupied with curing cancer; I'm sorry to report that I haven't, because on a majority of these days I was actually sick. But there were other days that were more personal. Days where I needed to gather my thoughts.

The thought I turned to most frequently was Socrates' statement that the "unexamined life is not worth living." I don't remember the first time I heard it, but I

know that ever since I've asked myself how I can go about living an examined life. A life with a proper perspective. A life of meaning, and fulfillment, and a life of happiness. And whether or not you realize it, I think that many of you have been asking the same question. So what I'd like to offer you tonight is a glimpse through the three most promising lenses of life I've discovered, and how they bring a more promising world into sharper focus.

The first lens is knowledge. And let me be specific in what I mean: I'm talking about the sort of information that makes us pause and consider its implications. These could be the descriptions of women and men from the annals of history that have most moved us, or unexpected oddities about nature that make us think differently about our place in the universe. These are the opportunities granted to us by the gift of our education *this* far. And while it may be tempting, in the shortsightedness of youth, to dismiss this or that fact as irrelevant, let's make it an effort to strive towards something greater. To welcome learning for the sake of learning, and never, under any circumstances, let a curiosity go unexplored.

There is a pleasure in knowing things; and there is also a pleasure in *experiencing* things. And there is a depth and complexity to the human experience that we cannot always express in conventional ways. Which is why the second lens I look through is art, because art offers the most intimate portrait of what it means to be human. Goethe once said "a man should hear a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the soul." And that's what we've *been doing* for the past four years of our lives. Not only have we heard music, many of us have played music. Others have

written poetry. Still others have painted pictures. Let's not let ourselves make the mistake of keeping art at a distance—of treating it as something that exists only in a museum or in a book. Art is something we should *engage* with. And when we find art that moves us, and art that makes us look at the world and ourselves differently, *this* is the art we should treasure, because this is what lets the mind look at the world in new and unfamiliar ways.

But there's one last lens that I think is even more powerful and moving than the first two. And this is the lens of love.

I spent a large part of my childhood living with my grandparents, and the first experience I had that taught me the significance of love came from my grandfather. By the time I was 7 years old, he was dying of cancer. And the night before he passed away unexpectedly, I was talking to him on the phone, planning a Friday night we intended to spend together. At the time, I had no idea that these would be the last moments I would hear his voice. And when the conversation came to an end, I don't recall saying the words "I love you." And so far this has been the singular regret of my life. I haven't let the words go without saying since.

We say those three words often without pausing to think about what they mean. What they mean is that we invest a large part of our happiness and ourselves in another person. And these people are few and far between. Aside from my family, I can count the number of people I can say these words to honestly on one hand. And these people are my friends: the people who mean the world to me. I'd like you to think of the sort of people who love you unconditionally, and who remind you that they do when you need it the most. The last people we think of before we drift to sleep, and the first people we think of when we awaken in the morning. The people whose company can span from the

early hours of the evening to the early hours of the morning. Because these are the people who we won't soon forget; and we shouldn't take for granted the opportunity to remind them that they've come to mean this much.

So here we are—on the shore of the sea of the rest of our lives. We were also here four years ago, but in retrospect it doesn't seem to compare to the uncertainty laying before us now. There are times we'll be listless, and discouraged, and lonely—but with a bit of knowledge and a bit of art and a bit of love, we can navigate the waters of what will become our lives. And somewhere along the way, we'll find out where we are, and where we're going.

Thank you.