

Mrs. Hesser  
Graduation Speech  
May 23, 2014

Good evening and a hearty welcome to the class of 2014, your families, friends, and faculty and staff. Well, seniors, here you are. You made it! Tonight marks the end of your four years of high school and the beginning of a new adventure.

A moment ago I chose the word **hearty** to welcome you because I want to talk for a few minutes about 'heart' with you. In the last four years, when a teacher, fellow student, other leader, or priest led you in prayer, you repeated a certain phrase 4,816 times at the end of that prayer. In every class, at sports games, concerts, liturgies, meetings, and activities outside the classroom . . . at the very minimum, 4,816 times, after someone said "Live Jesus in our hearts, you said . . . forever!"

But have you thought about what that means? How do we live Jesus in our hearts?

Among our graduating class are many students, of enormous diversity, who have made the decision to live whole-heartedly. In this group are excellent student council leaders; others who have influenced by their elegant literary, dramatic, and musical grace; some who have set the pace in your classes by the force of their phenomenal intellects; many fantastic spiritual leaders who have immersed themselves in service and in guiding fellow students on retreats; and others who have contributed greatly by their athletic accomplishment.

Yet all of you have the common experience of knowing a certain culture, a certain way of being, by accomplishing all these things in the context of a Catholic, Lasallian school. As Lasallians we pray in this special way – about our *hearts* - because we know it has real and significant meaning.

Now you are leaving us . . . and we are hoping and praying you take that distinctive, special meaning with you. Because all of us NEED to live Jesus in our hearts. The world ahead of you will come with good and bad, tremendous joy and awful tragedy, and please believe me, and all the people here who love you and have lived much longer than you, life has a way of beating you up. Not particularly inspiring to hear that tonight, I know! But true. And at some point, if it hasn't happened already, your heart will be broken. There is only one way of avoiding that, and C.S. Lewis said it eloquently when he said: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even a pet. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable."

Be vulnerable, because the good news is that Jesus *is* here to live in our hearts. After He rose from the dead, he was walking along a country road with a couple of his disciples who didn't recognize Him. They were scared and tired and trying to figure out what happened. We, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, have sorrows, confusion, disillusionments, and despair.

With whom have you walked these past four years? You can look around you with hearts that are full of affection and understanding for others in your midst. Was Jesus among them? Or was He lost in the seemingly endless onslaught of information and rote acknowledgement of his abstract presence through all those classroom prayers? My very serious question to you is this: Will you know Him when you meet Him on

your own Emmaus journeys? Your journey may be dramatic or seemingly ordinary, but in the end, the impact you make will be all about bigger pictures and turning worlds upside down. When the Emmaus travelers finally recognized Him, they said to one another, "Did not our **hearts burn within us** while He talked with us by the way?" That zeal drove them the same hour back to Jerusalem where they confronted their world and changed it for the better. My message, my hope, my prayer for you is that on your journey, you will meet him and know him, and that your hearts will burn within you, and as a result, you will become the agents for positive change in a world that is today as much in need of you as it needed the Apostles some two thousand years ago.

e.e. cummings wrote a beautiful poem about love between two people, but it fits this idea so well: that we're living Jesus in our hearts and He is carrying us in His heart too. Cummings writes:

here is the deepest secret nobody knows

(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows higher than the soul can hope or mind can hide)

and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart)"

He carries your heart. WE carry your heart. Your parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, teachers, counselors, coaches, administrators . . . we carry your heart.

But here's the thing. From now on, YOU have to carry your heart, too. Going off to college, you have the privilege of remembering that. As one of my favorite authors, Frederick Buechner says: The grace of God means something like: "Here is your life. You might never have been, but you *are*, because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you. There's only one catch. Like any other gift, the gift of grace can only be yours if you'll reach out and take it. Maybe being able to reach out and take it is a gift too."

Reach out and take it, class of 2014. Grab it. Let your hearts burn within you. Carry your heart and remember - LIVE JESUS IN OUR HEARTS . . . FOREVER!! Congratulations and God bless!