

About halfway through my final cross country season at CB, late in September, we had our annual night meet at Del Oro High School. I had missed a week and a half of school because I had been in the hospital with my family, and had not gone to any athletic practice for that time either. And despite that, I decided to go to that meet, because I felt like I needed to clear my mind. I showed up that evening, and all of my teammates welcomed me after not having seen me for a long week and a half. I warmed up with my varsity teammates for our race, and I felt great. I felt like I was really going to come back strong for my team.

Then came the time of our race. The varsity boys all lined up, we prayed together, we waited for the gun, and then boom, we were off. The start was dusty but I still managed to keep a close distance to our top runners. I continued for the first half of the race with a healthy pace, and I felt like I was truly pushing myself. And then about halfway through, my body started to fail me. My lungs could not breathe in as deeply, I started feeling sharp aches in my sides, and my legs tensed up so that my stride was weakened dramatically. Slowly, I went from a top runner, to the back of the pack. I watched all of my teammates get away from me, and as I ran the entire second half of my race, Coach Delgado and all the cheering parents watched me struggle. My mentality switched from personal record, to "don't you dare stop." I was fighting to maintain a dead man's trot by the end of the race.

When I came to the final sprint around the track, everyone kicked into their final gear, but I had nothing left, and I watched jersey after jersey sprint passed me to the finish. I didn't stop, but I crossed the finish line with the slowest pace of my career. After I finished, my teammates were all congratulating one another after the race, because they had all run very well, and I could not even look at them because I had performed so poorly. They all finally saw me come in several minutes after them, and they watched me walk away to a spot by myself. And then my senior teammates, Adam Wong, Colin Campbell, and Michael Sparks III, all stopped their celebrations, to walk over to the defeated Elmer to make sure he was okay.

Fast forward a couple months. One afternoon early in this semester, Donovan Rooney, my Godbrother, and I were driving home from school. I remember it was a very chilly day because we had just had a strong storm with plenty of rain. I was watching the people passing my view on the street, wondering what they're names were, when suddenly one caught attention. He was an older black gentleman, with a long beard. He had torn jeans, from what I could see, and he was carrying a bunch of belongings with him. Enough to make me believe that he did not have a place to call home. See, the reason why he stood out on the street was that he was wearing a bold blue sweatshirt. And as we approached him, the writing on it became more and more recognizable, until we were right beside him, and I could see the great big Christian Brothers falcon logo across the front. On that

ride home, all I could think about was this: Who could have given him that sweatshirt? More than likely, the sweatshirt was donated somewhere, and he happened to pick it out randomly, but still, it fascinated me. I started naming all the faculty in my head, all the parents I knew, and then I thought about students, particularly those in my class. I started thinking about all of these names of fellow classmates who could have given that man that sweatshirt. And after a long car ride home I came to a final conclusion: it could have been anybody. And that was what I found so beautiful about that seemingly serendipitous moment. It could have been anybody. And that got me thinking about what other things my peers were doing that were making a positive impact on others' lives.

For me, one of the greatest benefits of studying at Christian Brothers has always been learning about the phenomenal people who share my education with me. Every day, I felt like I could learn something fascinating about a fellow peer, and be moved. And these amazing deeds that the members of the Class of 2016 were willfully and selflessly enacting every day blew my mind. They made me believe in a positive future because they helped me realize that anyone could serve another. Anyone. Your name could be Efrain Vallejo, and you could lead the Red Cross club in fundraising money to help those need. Or maybe, you could be Jack Noonan, and you could volunteer your mornings to make breakfast for the

Women's shelter. Or what about Skyler Zapata? If that's your name, you could sew blankets for the sole purpose of keeping someone *else* warm. Aidan Smith and a whole group of classmates could take a trip to the U.S. Mexico border to proactively pursue universal human dignity. Or maybe, your name could be Shelby Rodich, and you could give a night to Evening of Dreams, so that teens with special needs can experience the joy of prom for one night. These deeds speak volumes to the principles of my peers, and the institution that has nurtured them for the past four years.

These seemingly small acts became engrained in my mind as they perfectly describe the reason for which this class, and any CB class for that matter, is special. Yes, every year is different with its own quirks and idiosyncrasies, but we all have one thing in common: we are bound together by a set of values and principles that encourage us to act on our love. Class of 2016, I admire you because you have taken these Lasallian principles to heart, and have allowed me the privilege of experiencing their effects. What we've learned here goes beyond books and common knowledge, because quality education reaches much farther than a classroom. Inclusive community isn't a goal, but a standard. Concern for the poor isn't an idea, but an action. Respect for all people is a responsibility. And faith in the presence of God is a blessing.

All of these principles, which have been so instilled in us, have taught us one thing, and I think St. John Baptist de La Salle said it best when he said: "We are called like apostles to make God known to others." Thanks to Christian Brothers, you all understand that God is love, and every small act of love goes a long way.

So Class of 2016, here is what I ask of you: as you all disperse across the United States, and the world, and you search passionately for your vocation, remain true to the one vocation of every Lasallian. This vocation has many names, and many interpretations, but it is up to each and every one of us to exemplify the benevolence of Christian Brothers High School. To some of us, it means being a good Christian, to most of us, it means "living the fourth," but to *all* of us, it means: "Leaving to serve."

Class of 2016, Serve the world.

Thank You.