

2015 Convocation Remarks

Good evening, and a Bellarmine welcome to each and every one of you, especially to our newest students and your families, and to the Bellarmine faculty and staff to whom you have entrusted your higher education.

I hope you had a great summer! I'm glad to say that I did. It was particularly good because my wife, Maureen, and I got to spend time with our fraternal twin sons, their two wonderful spouses, our daughters – and five little and not-so-little McGowans.

It also was great because a lot of that time was spent on Long Beach Island, New Jersey, a barrier reef island, about five miles out into the Atlantic Ocean. And the beach is a great place to be with family and friends.

When I'm at "the shore," as folks from that part of the country call it, there are many things I like to do – enjoying steamed clams at Harvey Cedars Shellfish Company, reading a lot of books, getting a delicious breakfast sandwich at Neptune Deli – but the most special moments for me are those mornings I get up before dawn to watch the sunrise.

It's a sacred time, a genuinely quiet time, even the breaking waves seem to break softly in the morning. A few seagulls, sandpipers, and plovers are making themselves known – but basically it is a quiet time, a very quiet time.

But it also is a very beautiful and dramatic time, as you wait patiently for the dawn and sunrise to unfold – an event that has been taking place throughout the world since the earth was created.

Sometimes in these moments, my mind is active as it reflects in spiritual and philosophical ways on the meaning of it all. But also sometimes, my mind enjoys a Zen moment, if you will, a quiet moment, filled only with a profound sense of awe and gratitude.

A very important figure in the life of the Bellarmine University community is the late monk Thomas Merton from the nearby Abbey of Gethsemani – whose writings continue to be a rich source of inspiration and direction for many of us.

But one of his quotes that I find particularly helpful is "This day will never come again."

When you put together the experience of a dawn, the beginning of a brand new day – with the awareness that not only has this event occurred from the beginning of time – but also simultaneously that it is a precious, singular, unique, one-time event in space and time, I believe there is an opportunity for you to think in similar ways about each of your lives today, especially about both the "dawn" of today, but also the poignant beauty of the reality that this also is a moment in your life with a beginning, middle, and end –

that it is in this regard special and unique and all yours – and that this day will come only once.

With those thoughts and feelings in mind, with the joy and pleasure of a restful, energizing summer, with an awareness or at least an imagination of what your summers might have been like – especially as you began to anticipate and prepare for your time at Bellarmine, I think there is some meaning in these metaphors for you.

Because in joining the Bellarmine University learning community, your life and future, like a new day, spreads out before you with seemingly infinite possibilities, and yet you are initially encouraged and challenged to be conscious of each day you are here, because each day is your day, your chance to open your mind and heart and soul to new learning, new knowledge, new perspectives, new friends, new values, new ideas, and to take advantage of this once in a lifetime opportunity to build and create your future – by taking one step at a time, one day at a time, fully conscious that while your journey, your search for meaning over your lifelong adventure – that you make that journey and you participate in that search – one step and one very special and unique day at a time.

Bellarmino University's branding language encourages all of us in our journeys, in our searches for what is good and beautiful and true in life – to “explore the world” yes – but from within our authentic center, within a sense of ourselves as beautiful, unique, infinitely valuable persons of great intrinsic, God-given dignity – and to take one day at a time, keenly aware of the special gift and opportunity of each day, and make it meaningful – whether it is taking your academic work seriously, or working to get in shape, or meeting new friends while enjoying the ones you have, or traveling abroad, or having a great nap, or falling in love, or getting to a concert downtown, or reading a really great book.

Finally, implicit in this reflection, this encouragement to you to build and create yourself and your sense of the good, the beautiful, and the true in life with the help of our dedicated, talented faculty members and staff, and with all of the knowledge in this world which now, thanks to technology, is literally at your fingertips – is a call to a life of both action and contemplation, of mixing it up in a full, aggressive, robust engaged way with life and with your life, while at the same time, on a regular basis, even daily perhaps, making sure that you take time to turn down the noise, clutter, and distractions in our daily lives – including your Bellarmine University life – to reflect on yourself and what you are experiencing, to think about what you are learning, about what you are doing well and not doing well, and what you might do to change things, and so forth.

And then, from this quiet, sacred inner-conscious self and sense of things – then to jump back passionately and vigorously into your life fully and to live it to the fullest.

Contemplation and action, followed by contemplation and action, followed by contemplation and action – that experience if you will of welcoming into your consciousness the dawn of each new day, the day that will not come again – and then

living and learning and enjoying each day to the fullest as you create your life, the meaning in your life – and through this alternating rhythm of action and contemplation – to build yourself, your life, your relationships, and your future.

At this time in your life, with so many things going on, so many welcomes, so much advice, and so many changes – I hope my reflection makes some sense to you.

I certainly assure and promise you that the Bellarmine University faculty, staff, and I are deeply committed to you and to your life and will make sure we are doing everything in our power to help you make your Bellarmine education and your life a great success.

Thank you and Godspeed.

Dr. Joseph J. McGowan President