

Commencement Spring 2010

This is the time in the University ceremony in which the President gives his “charge” to the graduating class – Go ye forth, O Bellarmine Knights, and do this or do that or do yet another thing!

But before getting into that, on behalf of the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, and alumni of Bellarmine, I wish to say congratulations on the achievement of your Bellarmine degree, and now, officially welcome you to the distinguished group of over 18,000 alumni and alumnae throughout the world!

You know, of course, how much you have learned at Bellarmine, but I am not so sure that you have as good a sense as you might about how much you teach those of us on the faculty and staff – about being human, being lifelong learners, being loving, open, and generous – and many other things.

In many ways, during your time here, you became not only our teachers, but through your courage, imagination, and achievement – our heroes and heroines as well.

And your graduating class of over 400 includes so many wonderful stories.

I think of **Keisuke Kawaguchi**, a Japanese undergraduate student, receiving a BA in Accounting and a minor in Economics. Keisuke was attending Tell City High School in the spring of 2006 because his dad was in the states for an international business opportunity. His dad and mom moved to China, but Keisuke wanted to stay here in the states at Bellarmine to complete his degree requirements. It is my understanding that Keisuke’s mom traveled today from Japan to attend Bellarmine’s commencement. Keisuke moved to the states with this family when he was 12, learned English and is now graduating with an Accounting degree from Bellarmine University. What an accomplishment!

We also want to recognize the **Flood** family. **Sherry Flood** today receives her master’s degree in Communications, the same day that her daughter, **Sarah**, receives her undergraduate Communications degree, cum laude.

I also am so impressed by **Andrew Parks**, a member of the men’s basketball team who is leaving Bellarmine today with three majors – Biology, Business Administration and Economics. He is a five-year graduate who will graduate magna cum laude and he is going to take time to prepare for the MCAT next fall and apply to medical school. Andrew also received honors during Undergraduate Research Week for his economics poster on the impact of health-insurance status on motor vehicle fatalities.

I was told today by one of our staff members that they recently spoke with Andrew’s mother about sending a news release on his research honor to his hometown paper in Corbin. We mentioned to Andrew’s mom that we were pitching a story about Andrew to *The Courier-Journal* because he’s a basketball player with three degrees who’s

graduating magna cum laude. His mother said, “*Magna cum laude?* I thought it was summa. I told him not to take that test with a concussion!” Tough standards!

But a favorite senior story that reinforces my sense of the spirit, competence, and competitiveness of your class is about a moment in the life of **Emily O’Bryan** and our women’s softball team.

At her third time at bat, which would be her final time at bat as a Bellarmine Knight, she stepped up to the plate knowing that the bases were full of three of her teammates. Patiently, Emily took a called strike on the first pitch, but then on the second pitch proceeded to blast a line drive grand slam home run that cleared the 10-foot fence in right center field!

Emily, I didn’t get a chance to write to you after that accomplishment, but as someone who loves the game and the Class of 2010, it said a lot to me about you and about the tremendous character and personality of your class.

I have been greatly impressed with the Class of 2010 throughout your time here, from the stories about your Crossroads orientation achievement through this week at the Senior picnic, Honors and Awards Dinner, and today at Mass, especially with the remarks of our three amazing student speakers.

I have kept thinking – whatever the most important things are that the faculty, staff, and I want you to “get,” you get it, and you get those things in abundance. You embody the wisdom of our mission with an education grounded in the values-rich content of the liberal arts, enhanced by world-class professional and career preparation.

Of course, you don’t know all of the important things there are to know; no one of us does, but that is why at Bellarmine, we try to light a flame – and that is why we encourage lifelong learning for every graduate.

But you do seem to me and to us to have the highly desired orientation of the heart, mind, and soul that positions you very well for continuing to grow, learn, and achieve and have a very successful life on so many of the most serious and significant levels.

As I realized this feeling I have about you and the Class of 2010, I also realized that in my “charge,” I really do not have to tell you anything new, but rather what I can and should do is to help make you aware of how well you are doing and to encourage you to keep going.

When I was your age, there was a classic film called “The Graduate” starring Dustin Hoffman and Ann Bancroft. In the midst of his graduation party, a friend of his father’s comes up to Dustin’s character to share what he believes to be a great pearl of wisdom, and says, “I have one word for you – PLASTICS.”

I don’t know if the plastics industry is still viable or if it is still the hot industry that then assured immense material success, but the one word I want to celebrate, affirm, and encourage with you and your class is – PERSPECTIVE.

In my experience at Bellarmine, yours is a class distinguished in its sense of balance, proportion, priorities, and integration – all signs of your intelligence and wisdom.

So my charge to you as you go forward is simply, but not exclusively, to nurture that balance and integration in your heart, mind, soul, and spirit.

In Chapter 8 of Mark's Gospel, the great question is asked, "What doth it profit a man (or woman) to gain the whole world, yet suffer the loss of his own soul?"

The answer, of course, is that it profits him nothing of any true meaning or consequence, and creates instead a thoroughly shallow, empty, and tragic life.

As fate would have it, this semester I kept reading things that kept driving home this very important point that St. Mark makes.

One of these was a March 30 *New York Times* article by David Brooks. In his article, he makes the remark that over the past four decades, teams of researchers have been studying happiness. "Their work," he says, "which seemed flimsy at first, has developed an impressive rigor, and one of the key findings is that, just as the old sages predicted, worldly success has shallow roots, while interpersonal bonds permeate through and through." The Class of 2010 "gets it" about the value of worldly success in relation to the value of interpersonal bonds, love, and friendship.

Again, St. Mark's compelling question came to mind later this semester when I read a *Wall Street Journal* article written by a psychiatrist, Iain McGilchrist. The article was adapted from his recently published and brilliant book: "The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World."

While strongly recommending this article and this book in which McGilchrist updates us on the most recent research findings about both hemispheres of the human brain and the relationship and interdependence, I will spare you his characterizations of the attitude and interaction of both hemispheres, though those make for truly fascinating reading.

Suffice it to say for my remarks, however, that in individuals as in cultures, it can occur that one hemisphere or the other comes to dominate the perspective of an individual or a culture, and that the left hemisphere of the brain has increasingly been dominating Western culture, and the right hemisphere increasingly is being discounted.

Again, this isn't fair to reference the functions of both hemispheres without going to some length to elaborate on their different characteristics. But in relation to St. Mark's question, what Mr. McGilchrist was saying to me was that in Western culture, we seem to be getting more and more caught up with details, fragments, literalism, and less mindful of what we might call the big picture, context, the relationship of things, play, creativity, proportion, perspective, balance, and integration in our experience of life.

Interpreted in the context of St. Mark's question, therefore, in Western culture these days, we are driven by our culture more to do things to try and gain the whole world,

than we are driven to be attentive and nurturing to our souls, to our human spirit, to the light within each of us.

Like Brooks, McGilchrist points out that our consuming pursuit of self interest “has not left us happier.”

After citing data to support that conclusion, McGilchrist points out that “what makes us happy is not wealth, but the reciprocal relationships between ourselves and one another, ourselves and the world.” At Bellarmine, we would add to those key relationships a reciprocal relationship with God, but once again on the deep and enduring value of profound reciprocal relationships, the Class of 2010 “gets it.”

It is my profound hope, therefore, that in your experience at Bellarmine with our faculty, staff, fellow students, academic programs, and student life, we have helped you empower yourselves to go forth and, in Mark’s language, “gain the world,” but also that you have learned how important, valuable, and worthy of love you are as a human being, possessing as you and every human being does, intrinsic dignity and infinite value – and in the process, you have learned how truly and appropriately to love and understand yourself – and then, from that center, that you have learned how important it is to love others and take them seriously as you do yourself – these very relationships that St. Mark, David Brooks, and Iain McGilchrist see as not only important but absolutely essential to a happy, meaningful, and successful life.

From what I have seen and been fortunate enough to come to know of the Class of 2010, however, I have every confidence that you will continue to live, love, and grow with great perspective.

Again, congratulations and thanks, and Godspeed, Class of 2010.