

Remarks at St. Mary's International School
Commencement Exercises

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Brother Andrew, Brother John, members of the faculty, parents and friends.
And above all - the young men of this year's graduating class at St. Mary's.
Let me address you as if this were in my own country, Indonesia -- adik-adikku --
my younger brothers.

The opportunity to speak to a group of young people is always a most
welcome one to me, for I agree with the poet Robert Frost who wrote, "I go
to school to youth to learn the future." But tonight's occasion is a
particularly happy one for me on two counts.

First, as someone who has long been deeply interested in international
learning -- most recently at the United Nations University -- it is a
distinct pleasure to be addressing a group of students who can only be
described as a veritable United Nations in miniature. The student body at
St. Mary's, I am told, now represents 63 nations around the globe -- surely
a claim to cultural and geographic diversity that few other schools in the
world can match.

Secondly, on a more personal note, I am also very happy to be attending
the commencement of several of the sons of some of my closest colleagues at the
United Nations University. I know at first hand, therefore, something of how
hard you have worked to arrive at this important rite of passage in your lives --
and also how very proud your parents are of you at this moment.

A commencement takes its name, of course, from its true role as a

beginning -- even though in the nostalgia of this moment your mind might be much more fixed on the ending of a chapter of your lives and the exit from a memorable and pleasurable experience. But every exit, it has been said, is an entry somewhere else -- and for most of you that entry will be in a few months time when you begin college or university in some other part of the world.

For some of you, it will mean a return to your native land -- possibly a land whose customs of work and play or dress and diet you last experienced some time ago. For others, it will be entry into a totally new country and totally new cultural environment. Whatever your individual case, it seems safe to say that the beginnings of your college career are likely to be a jolt to your system in at least three ways:

First, it will mean leaving family and close friends behind -- and, perhaps for the first time in your lives, being on your own. While that may have its enticing prospects, it is likely also to generate more than a few butterflies in the stomach.

Second, it will mean adjusting to college life -- generally a far more unstructured and demanding combination of learning and play than you have known to date.

Third, it will mean adjusting to the customs, values and perceptions of another society or to your own society as seen through changed eyes. Either way it is bound to be a culture shock.

In leaving St. Mary's, you leave a very distinct environment, on whose uniqueness from most of the rest of the world stems from its mixture of many cultures -- where some of the most important lessons you have learned, with all due respect to your hard-working and dedicated teachers, have been those you have taught each other about respect for other ways of life, other beliefs,

other languages and races.

In adjusting to the impact of a new cultural situation you will be entering, you can make various responses. One would be to adopt a false sense of self-esteem and superiority over what appears to be narrow or parochial cultural surroundings. A second response would be a retreat into envy at your fellow classmates' confident sense of where they are and self-contempt at your own seeming lack of roots.

Both reactions would be wrong. They would be wrong because, either way, you would be denying the very essence of what St. Mary's has helped you become -- a multicultural person who has come to know, at a still young age, that there is great delight and wisdom in the world's diversities, but only when one honours and respects differences in others.

That is a lesson that much of the world has yet to learn, and the war and suffering that scar so much of this planet is a direct result of the lack of ability to empathize with our fellow human beings -- whatever their culture, colour, ideology, relative strength or social status -- and to come to recognize ourselves in others. Either we learn to love each, Barbara Ward said, or we will all perish.

So you need not worry about what you are -- for in the richness of your cross-cultural sensitivity, you could be harbingers of a future world that knows far more harmony, justice and sanity than the present one. The world is becoming an increasingly crowded, complex and fragile place -- a very small island. People who live on small, crowded islands -- or in conditions of extreme population density -- have learned that continual resort to violence and domination over one's neighbours is foolish. When one lives in such

circumstances, people's lives collide and rub and jostle against each other too much for a continuing state of conflict and tension to be bearable. Living on our small global island, with its growing billions of people, we will have to learn a great deal more about managing tensions and social harmony.

This will be a learning task for your generation -- for I am talking about your world and your future, not mine. My generation won't be here any longer -- you will be the ones making the decisions. It is therefore vitally important that you try to preserve within you that precious sensitivity to others that your St. Mary's experience has helped to breed in you. You need not worry about becoming part of the majority wherever it is you go in these next few years. It is much more important that you retain your own sense of self -- that inner core of strength that the poet Yoshida Kenko called "The blossoms of the heart no wind can touch". Make no mistake about it, that inner core will be tested many times as you encounter the unknown and the inexplicable in life -- but such testing will make it all the stronger.

It is important to recognize that the learning you have experienced here has been grounded in spiritual values. Not through any strict indoctrination of formal ritual or belief -- for that would deny the very tolerance which is part of your multicultural heritage -- but rather in the moral and ethical framework that has helped give shape and texture to your education.

You leave here well-equipped -- with an already well-tuned intercultural sensitivity that I hope you will never lose. I believe you will find that the values you have gained here at St. Mary's will be important sources of strength in your future lives. But the growth in one's values is a never-ending life-long process -- depending largely on choices you will be asked to make as an

inevitable part of life. Out of the choices you make, as you become aware of new or expanded values, will be fashioned your own self-identity, your own capacity to relate to others as human beings, and hence your place in this world. This is all part of the voyage called life. Let me congratulate you on this occasion, younger brothers, and wish you Godspeed and good luck on that voyage.

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