

Principal Jason D. Curtis

Graduation 2015 Speech

On behalf of our school community, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank those who have worked so hard to support the class of 2015.

Thank you Bishop Burbidge, for your commitment to Catholic education, for the many ways you make sure that our students and families know of your love and encouragement, and especially for your generosity in allowing a priest of the Diocese to serve in our school. Fr. Romen's love for students and colleagues, his pastoral care, and his wonderful sense of humor have been a blessing to our school. St. Gabriel parish is getting an outstanding pastor, and we know that he will continue to grow Catholic education in Greenville. We also thank you for supporting the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in having Sr. Laura serve at our school, and we wish her all the best in her studies at Boston College next year. We are looking forward to welcoming Fr. Tom Duggan to Gibbons, and we thank you Bishop Burbidge for your continued commitment to the presence of priests and religious men and women in our school.

To our Superintendent Dr. Michael Fedewa, and to our Board of Trustees, thank you for your tremendous leadership and care for the future of our school community.

And to my colleagues, faculty and staff of Cardinal Gibbons High School: thank you. As both your colleague, and as a parent with children at our school, I'm incredibly grateful for your love and care for our students. I'd especially like to thank four colleagues who are celebrating their retirement from Catholic Education this year: Mr. Weinstein, Mrs. Krull, Mr. Bierlein and Mrs. Price. I'd ask that all of our faculty and staff please stand so that we may properly thank you.

Finally, to the families, and especially the parents of our graduates, I want to thank you for your faith and trust in our school. Thank you for your commitment to Catholic education, for your partnership with our faculty, and for sharing with us the joy of forming your children.

At Baccalaureate Mass on Friday night, and again this morning, our student speakers both mentioned Freshman Welcome Day. For visiting relatives and friends, I'd like to take a moment to describe this important day for our school.

On the morning of the first day at Gibbons a mother may wake up early, simply not believing that her baby boy is old enough to be in high school. Her son simply hopes that he's not going to be the only kid who shows up in the white polo and khakis uniform at Freshman Welcome.

Driving in to school on interstate 40, the mother looks at her son and is amazed how fast time has gone. She still sees him as that little boy, coming home after school and telling her all about his day, reading books together and having cookies.

The car pulls off Edwards Mill Road, into Gibbons, and behind 9000 other cars who must have gotten there at 6am. And now, waiting, they both get a little nervous.

As they pull up to the front of the school, they realize that there are hundreds of upperclassmen who are there to welcome the freshmen. Tears start to well up in the mother's eyes, and as she almost drives over one of the senior students directing traffic, she turns to give a tearful goodbye to her son. All of a sudden, someone is knocking on her window, interrupting the moment. It's a Gibbons staff member with a muffin, and a student with a magnet, saying "Welcome to Gibbons!" On the other side of the car, the passenger side door has been opened by three senior girls. The son has immediately forgotten his mother is in the car, he's forgotten his own name, but he's decided that he is going to really like high school.

The son goes on to have a wonderful first day filled with activities, meeting friends and learning about the Gibbons way. His mother drives around the corner, empties a box of Kleenex, and in what feels like only a couple of days, they're both sitting here in Memorial Auditorium at graduation.

It went fast!

That day is a wonderful memory; however, being welcomed to Gibbons is NOT the most important part of the story. The most important part of that day actually happened on the other side of the car door.

The real lesson that you have learned at Gibbons, was that it was more important to open the car door for someone else.

When families think about choosing a high school, they think about curriculum, what clubs and activities are offered, programs, and college admission rates.

This binder on the stage is not the rest of my speech. It's actually the curriculum from just one department at our school. Stuff that you learned. If you totaled up all the activities you've participated in at Gibbons, classes, clubs, sports, service projects, Spirit Week, Freshman Welcome, retreats and liturgies, you would have hundreds and hundreds of binders like this on the stage. These binders aren't really what you learned at Gibbons.

You'll get binders throughout your lives. Whether an actual binder or a digital one, you'll get a bunch of information from your college about registration and dormitory housing. On your first day at work, you'll get an orientation binder, filled with policies and benefits. You'll put together a binder to organize your wedding, and when you purchase your first house, you'll get a binder filled with details.

These binders contain what you GET, but what will be most meaningful in your life is what you will GIVE.

A job isn't only what benefits and salary you get, it's a chance to create growth and opportunities for others.

A home isn't about square footage, warranties and the homeowner's association – it's a place where you create wonderful memories with loved ones.

Parenting isn't about what we get from our children; it's about all of our joy and hope for them. It's about loving them more than we love ourselves.

A vocation to priesthood or religious life isn't summed up in the rules or sacrifices; it's giving witness to God's love for us and the opportunity to serve God and others.

In the first reading at Mass today we heard the story of Pentecost. What everyone remembers about the story is the rushing presence of the Holy Spirit, wind and fire coming upon a frightened group of Apostles huddled together in a room. They received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But that's not the most important part of the story.

The Apostles went out into the street. They gave a diverse group of people a unifying message of hope and love, of Christ's death and resurrection. If the Apostles had stopped at what they were given, their time with Jesus and the gifts of the Spirit, we wouldn't have our Church today. God called them, as he calls us, to take what we have been given, and to give it to others.

This past week, a Gibbons graduate stopped by campus. She was a very successful athlete here, and in her first 2 years of college has already played in a national championship game. We asked her, what's the plan after college? Maybe playing professionally? She responded that it was an option, but it didn't interest her all that much. She said that she had learned at Gibbons, and found it to be true in college as well, that what she enjoyed most was playing for her teammates and her school. Playing professionally, to her, felt like she'd just be playing for herself.

Play for others. Learn so that you can help others. Work on behalf of others. Pray for others.

What was most important thing about Freshman Welcome Day? More than an hour before that mom and son pulled up to Gibbons, hundreds of you, as seniors, were gathered in the gym, giving up the last day of your summer break, excited about preparing a day for others. And your class, the Class of 2015 did this so many times. You planned the first ever Middle School Leadership Conference, where you gave leadership training not only to middle school students but over 30 teachers from Catholic Schools in our Diocese. You filled the stands at games with unprecedented spirit and joy, rooting for each other. Even during your graduation weekend, yesterday, cheering on two of our teams who played so hard for each other and represented your school so well. You convinced us to allow the entire school to roam freely, unsupervised in the school halls for an hour just so that your class could give them leadership opportunities for next year. Your class gave our school the chance to do things that we never imagined, because you wanted to do them for others. You played for others, you learned, worked and prayed for others, and by giving, others so much you have made our school a better place. And when you go out into the world, you'll continue to give to others, more than you get. That will be the most important part of your story.

Please know that we have been blessed by your time at Cardinal Gibbons, by all that you have given us. We love you very much, and we will miss you, and we pray that God will continue to bless you in all that you do.

Congratulations.