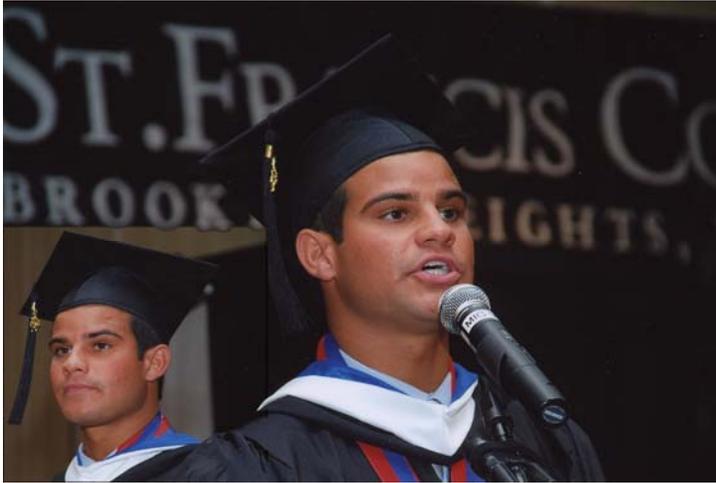


Joseph Buoncore - Class of 2005



With your kind permission, I would like to dedicate this speech in loving memory of my grandfather, Joseph Schicchi. He has left a lasting legacy to always value the power and love of learning. This legacy is a boundless treasure that I will always hold dear to my heart.

My grandfather was a man of prayer who loved his Catholic faith and tradition. As part of that Catholic tradition, I would

like to offer the following prayer:

Merciful God, give me the grace to desire what is most pleasing to thee, to search for it wisely, to know it truly, to accomplish it faithfully, for the glory of thy name – through Christ Our Lord...Amen.

Good morning Members of the Board of Trustees, President Macchiarola, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Administration & Faculty, Fellow Graduates, Parents, Alumni and Friends. You have all just heard a simple prayer that, in my humble opinion, reflects the meaning of our existence.

Throughout my journey at St. Francis College, I like to believe that I took advantage of the college's unique location. It is an institution that seems to have been perfectly placed in the heart of Brooklyn Heights, five short blocks from one of the best views tuition could buy - the Brooklyn Promenade. I would often visit the Promenade and I would find myself reflecting not only on the words of this prayer, but also, on life's most difficult questions. In short, the tranquility of the Promenade allowed me the opportunity to reflect on the meaning and purpose of my existence as a young, Catholic, Italian-American, Brooklynite. It seems to me that our lives are innately routine – we awake to a hard, long, and sometimes stressful day, and we are occasionally graced with the pleasures of laughter and light. But what is the end result?

My fellow graduates, I am not here to preach to you this morning because that is not my job. Rather, I simply urge each of you to dedicate your lives to a search for both spiritual and personal fulfillment. Do not become a helpless victim trapped in a soul-killing pattern of meaningless routine. Life is too precious to walk these streets with a dull, empty look. And in those moments of distress and anger, reflect on the possibility to choose hope before fear.

I have learned that life isn't a journey simply from point "A" to point "B." Along our journeys from point "A" to point "B," there are detours, disappointments and heartaches, which often represent our difficulties. However, as the prayer suggests, everything is an opportunity for grace, and these challenges must also be seen as opportunities to see Christ. I believe that God brings certain people into our lives in those moments we call "bittersweet." I say bittersweet because in the midst of pain and suffering there is always the choice to hope and not despair. Even Jesus looked to others for assistance during times of struggle. As you may recall, Simon helped Jesus carry His cross. My dear friend, Mr. Bob Violetto, you relentlessly guided and advised me throughout my high school years: thank you for being the "Simon" in my life.

I believe that we all need "Simons" in our lives. In my parish of St. Athanasius, there is a homeless man, who is viewed by many as an annoying, money-hungry man. Yet, for me, he is another "Simon" because there are times when I look at him and I am thankful to know a person like him. Each minute, of each hour, of each day is a struggle for him. He doesn't know where he'll end up the next day, or how much change he'll scratch up to survive. But, in the end, I am thankful to know him because he is a constant reminder of how grateful I should be - grateful for the talents and abilities that God has bestowed upon me; grateful for certain opportunities which are handed to me, and most of all, grateful for the loving and supportive family God has blessed me with. And it is through their unconditional love that I have found a purpose to my life.

Five and a half weeks ago, Dr. Macchiarola called me into his office and told me something that changed my life forever: he informed me that I would be the valedictorian of the graduating class. After seeing how proud my family was, I suddenly realized that making my family proud is all I ever wanted. At the age of 21, I experienced a vivid sense of peace and joy.

To properly acknowledge the tremendous amount of love, respect and admiration I have for my family, I would kindly ask my mother and father, my sister, Danielle, my brothers, John and Chris, and my grandmother, to please stand (*pause*): thank you all for being who you are. This day would not be possible without each of you and I admire the love we share. You have taught me many things, but most of all, you have taught me how to have a grateful heart. Thank you. You may be seated.

And I ask you to bear with me a few moments as I acknowledge others who have played an important role in my life. To my girlfriend, Melissa: I thank you not only for your understanding heart, your gentle soul, and your never-say-die attitude, but more importantly, for having patiently and lovingly help me recognize that I, as a recovering perfectionist, should value baby steps of effort as much as gold medals and perfection. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to two parish priests, Fr. Richard Long and Msgr. David Cassato, for being compassionate men of faith. I commend President Macchiarola for his outstanding leadership, Professor Hughes for his wisdom and patience, and Professor Sparr for his tireless dedication. To the entire Saint Francis

College faculty and to all my professors throughout the years: thank you for your abilities to share your knowledge and for allowing me to grow as an individual.

And so I leave you with one final quote this morning: “*I need to believe that something extraordinary is possible.*” John Nash, who you might recall from the film, *A Beautiful Mind*, received these words of encouragement when facing his most difficult challenge.

Born in 1928, John Nash was a renowned mathematician who developed and applied mathematical theories to economics. With his intellect and ingenuity, he became an academic icon. But, nothing comes easy. In 1958, John encountered a detour and developed paranoid schizophrenia. His once enviable life was shattered because of mental illness. Nevertheless, Nash would ultimately overcome his struggles with schizophrenia to win the Nobel Prize in 1994. My friends, this is not to say that each of you will win a Nobel Prize, but it is to express the mere fact that Nash saw his struggle as an opportunity to successfully overcome life’s inevitable difficulties.

My fellow graduates, something extraordinary is possible in this room this morning. For I have faith that each of you will continue your journeys, embracing its detours with success, humility, compassion and happiness. I believe that Saint Francis has prepared each of you to accomplish such a difficult mission free of any material or self-serving distractions. And you will do this all through God’s undying love by faithfully recognizing the endless opportunities for grace.

Congratulations to you all and may God continue to bless each of you. Thank you.