

Matthew Delfino

Valedictorian Speech Spring 2014



Thank you for that wonderful Introduction! Good Afternoon, Members of the Board of Trustees, President Dugan, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Administration, Faculty and Staff, and Fellow Graduates. I'd first like to briefly thank some people very special to me. Sister Sennick, Dr. Galgan, Dr. Sorrentino,—each of you gave me guidance and lessons that went beyond the classroom, and for that I am thankful. More importantly, I'd like to thank some members of my family. To my stepmother, Sara, and my four older brothers, who were never reluctant to give their time, money, or words to me -thank you. To my father, I owe you so much I felt every bit of your sacrifice over the years; I love you and thank you. Class of 2014, we made it. It has been a long and arduous journey full of some of the best moments of our lives, and some moments we hope we could forget. I truly feel privileged to be standing in front of you today.

We live in a world riddled with speculation, skepticism, and governed by appearances. Our politics is filled with pessimism, and attempts to deeply divide all of us. Our markets are reflective of a people whose interests lie solely in what they can acquire. A normal standardize education is now based immensely in specialization and technical training. In fact the notion of technical training is so common place that coming to a small liberal arts commuter college is now breaking the norms of our society – and what a great choice we've made.

Unique to the students of St. Francis College, is that we all have a story of how we ended up here. For myself, my four brothers and I were raised by my father. I was content on making excuses about why I slacked – a mother walking out on her children, not having the best things (or close to it), and being teased for being different. I would use these as excuses to misbehave, underperform and be content with mediocrity. In the Spring of 2010, while all of my friends were going away for university, I was here, in New York. I saw this as the biggest set back of my entire life. What is now evident, is that it was the biggest set-up. What I did was apply to a college in a borough that I'd never been to, and college that I never heard of. I was guided by faith. I didn't need to see the whole road, just a few feet in front of me.

Upon entering, all of us were taught the story of the Franciscan brothers that came to Brooklyn to promote lifelong education for the underserved and instill the values of humility, community, and service to all. Those Franciscan Brothers must be proud of how far we've come. This begged the question in my mind of how a group of Brothers (though they were men of the cloth) could be committed to a cause ultimately so outside of themselves. The truth is, they were motivated by purpose and service. Martin Luther King Jr. once said "if you have nothing to die for, you

have nothing to live for.” Class of 2014, what’s burning in your hearts? What is burning in your hearts so much that you would adopt a cause you would be willing to die for?

Your purpose is connected to a contribution. It’s not just what teaches us, but it’s what teaches others. At St. Francis we don’t just graduate with a bachelor’s degree, we graduate with a mission to serve. We aren’t gifted for our selves, but for others. We see enough of the material pleasures in the world, the world of appearances – those pleasures will come but they are not the end in itself. Ultimately, nobody remembers what things you had, but they will remember the lives you’ve touched. Live purposefully. In so doing, you will make manifest of the glory of god within you.

All of us are in a position to do so. Teddy Roosevelt once said “do what you can, with what you have, where you are.” It’s possible to get started today. You can’t start where you’re not, you have to start where you are. How many people do you hear say, next semester I’m going to get my grades up, or next month I’m going to go to thy gym? If you commit yourself too much to the long-term, you’ll miss opportunities that are right in front of you. When I stopped looking years down the road, I was able to see the beautiful city of New York right in front of my eyes, and the gem of St. Francis in the corner of them. Be micro-ambitious, in relentless pursuit of short term goals.

Don’t wait around for opportunity to present itself, live an “on purpose” life. Too many people sleepwalk through life without purpose. Your circumstance doesn’t define you. We are past the point of blaming others for our transgressions. Being here today proves that we do not have to be the product of the circumstances in our lives, but rather we can be the product of our aspirations. We do not look like what we’ve been through, but rather we look like what we want to be.

Class of 2014, remember coming to St. Francis was a Set up. We must remain steadfast, committed, and unshakable. See your goals as done. Live for a cause that you would die for and continue to walk by faith. God bless you all, thank you!