

Providence College
Ninety-First Commencement Exercises
May 17, 2009
Commencement Greetings – Rev. Brian J. Shanley, O.P., President

Good morning and welcome to our 91st Commencement Exercises. On behalf of Providence College, I want to congratulate all of our graduates on their achievement. Most of you have gone the traditional route of 4 years of undergraduate studies, supported by your parents, to achieve your degrees. Some of you have gone to school at night over many years, balancing families and careers, to receive a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. What you all have in common is now a Providence College degree, and the hope and promise of a thoughtful and meaningful life.

I must admit that I feel a special kinship with the undergraduate students because we moved in together four years ago. My rooms in St. Dominic House were a little bigger than what you moved into, and I think I had a few more books, but we all arrived in the summer of 2005 for the next adventure of our lives. We came with our hopes and our dreams and our uncertainties about the future. I do not know about you, but it has been a fast four years for me. Some things went the way that we had hoped for, and some things did not. And some of the things that did not go the way we wanted were the experiences that we learned from the most.

As we reflect together on our four years, I think we leave the place stronger than when we found it, and I am grateful for all you have contributed to the College these last four years. I especially want to thank you for your senior class gift, which is the largest in Providence College history. In these difficult economic times, your generosity to the College is truly admirable and makes a powerful statement about the character of your class. Let me tip my hat to you and lead the applause.

I have two last things to say to you. First, you are ready to go. I had a conversation last week with Liz Wolf, the outgoing President of Student Congress, in which she told me how she had recently attended a national conference of student leaders in Washington, D.C. After a few days interacting with students from schools all over the country, Liz told me that she realized she could hold her own with anyone and that she felt prepared by her education at Providence College to take her place in the world. You will find the same thing, if you do not know it already: You have been prepared by your education to make your mark in the world. No matter what in the providence of God you are asked to do, you are ready because you have learned how to think, the most basic goal of a liberal arts education. In these uncertain economic times, you have the most valuable assets in the world: the capacity to think and a firm moral compass.

As much as you have learned at Providence College, however, your learning is not over. As good as your Providence College education has been, you do not know it all. But you do know how to learn what you do not yet know. And this is my second point: Do not stop learning – it is a lifetime’s task. I hope that your education has humbled you enough to know the truth of what Plato teaches in an exchange in the *Symposium*:

“None of the gods philosophizes, nor do fools; for that is what is bad about ignorance—that you think you know enough.

Who then are the philosophers, since they are neither the ones who know nor the ones who do not know?

It’s so obvious, Socrates, that a child could understand—they are the ones in-between.

I hope that your education at Providence College has made you philosophers, lovers of wisdom, living in the in-between of knowing and not knowing. The capacity and desire for continual learning is as important an outcome of your Providence College education as what you already know. I hope you never lose your desire for wonder that Goethe expressed so beautifully when he said *Zum erstaunen bin ich da*—I exist for wonder.

Your last big adventure began four years ago. Your next one begins today. What you will accomplish is known only to the providence of God. But trust that by that same providence, these last four years have made you ready for what lies ahead. So do not be afraid. Go forth with confidence. Trust in your education and in your God. Neither will let you down. May God bless all the days of your life.

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