Valedictory Remarks
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Mr. Karsten, Br. Thomas, members of the administration, Faculty, Parents, Friends and Fellow Graduates. There is a challenge, and an art, to creating a concise address which aims to be both valedictory – a speech devoted to farewells – and commencement – a speech devoted to beginnings. My favorite example from literature is the following gem of obscurity spoken by a HOBBIT about to leave his friends and embark on a new journey:

“I shall not keep you long. I have called you all together for a Purpose...to tell you that I am immensely fond of you all, and that eleventy-one years is too short a time to live among such excellent and admirable hobbits.”

So said Bilbo Baggins, whose curiosity about a lost ring set in motion an epic battle between good and evil in JRR Tolkien’s masterpiece The Lord of the Rings. Speeches with dual purposes are often equivocal, and graduation speeches often only bathe an appreciative audience in flights of soaring rhetoric... but...let me offer my perspective.

We graduates are, for the most part, about eighteen years old. We are not yet at an age where we can look backward to our past and forward to our future with any measure of symmetry. We instinctively look forward... because most of our lives are ahead of us, most of our accomplishments yet to be won.

It would be pretentious to paint a glorious picture of the future awaiting us. The travails of our graduating counterparts in colleges and universities are not lost on us: jobs are not as plentiful in America as they once were; many families know unemployment firsthand; prominent politicians posture about having turned a new page in our history, but their empty rhetoric is belied by our reality. And in the topsy-turvy world we cautiously enter, there are anomalies: human life is not considered sacred; cunning trumps virtue in politics and business; and enlightened opinion-formers relegate God to a holdover of medieval superstition.

But... there is HOPE.

THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE.

History is replete with exemplars who have shown us the way to enter into a difficult situation and extract the maximum amount of good from it. To single out one close to the hearts of AMHS students and alumni, we need only think of St. Marcellin Champagnat. He saw his native country devastated by the French Revolution and wracked by Napoleon’s lust for power. He saw young people devoid of any religious instruction. He saw young people denied formal schooling and living in extreme poverty. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, he chose not to curse the darkness of hunger and ignorance and war, but to light the candle of education in faith and culture to redeem a sick society. He started on a small scale, helping first one teenager and then more. And over time his mission grew into a teaching order of Brothers, and we Stanners – two hundred years later – are the direct beneficiaries of his commitment and sense of purpose.

The four years we have spent at Archbishop Molloy High School have left an indelible mark on us.
We appreciate, and will continue to appreciate, the value of a Catholic education. We have learned - both in the classroom and in our interactions with fellow students and with faculty - the connection between faith and reason, between intellectual formation and personal growth, between knowledge and how to use it in charity.

Our world is not that pristine and bountiful cornucopia beloved of commencement rhetoric...its very brokenness beckons us to use the talents God has given us, and the talents Archbishop Molloy High School has assiduously developed in us. We must work on our world; we must reform our world as its Creator wants it to be. We must be God’s eyes and hands in doing that work.

There are thousands of Stanners already fulfilling that call... There are about 400 of us in this auditorium today called to that work, And there will be another 400 next year and the year after that, And God willing, for many years to come.

With each one of us carrying forward just a measure of the missionary spirit of St. Marcellin, **who can tell what we might accomplish?**

Of course, as we graduate, we remember all the people in our lives who have brought us to this point. First and foremost, we thank our parents and family members who support and encourage us. We thank all the teachers who give of their knowledge and time to help us grow intellectually and morally. We thank the administrators and staff who make Archbishop Molloy such a friendly place to be. We thank too the people – family members, teachers and others – who were part of our lives during these four years but are no longer with us on this earth. And, as Carolina said, we thank each other for the gift of friendship. We hope to maintain these bonds as we continue on to myriad colleges and universities.

We are all wayfarers on the same journey, one which ultimately leads us, whatever path we take, whatever milestones we pass, to the same home. Permit me to quote again Mr. Baggins, who so aptly observed:

*“It’s a dangerous business stepping out your door.”*

It is indeed. We can stay inside... and be safe... and accomplish nothing. Or we can step outside with the calm serenity of the solid education imbued in us. We, the class of 2011, are prepared. We have the knowledge... the talents...and the skills. Our door is open, and we will step forward. Thank you.

As Mr. Baggins said in his farewell, *“I am immensely fond of you all,”* and even eleventy-one years in your company would have gone by as quickly as the past four years have. Thank you to all of you.