

CONGRATULATIONS:

- To faculty and staff
- To parents and extended families
- To board members, volunteers, donors
- ESPECIALLY, to you graduates for making this great day happen. Right to be PROUD, HAPPY, and GRATEFUL to faculty, staff, family, classmates, and to GOD (for all your many gifts.

Highlight four words today:

“**MAGIS**”—a Latin word: greater, more, better, higher ... used by St. Ignatius of Loyola who founded the Jesuit Order of priests and brothers Central to our mission in the world as Jesuits.

Mission Statement of GSS contains this sense of magis when it speaks of its purpose in your lives: “IN ORDER TO REACH THEIR FULLEST POTENTIAL.”

What is “potential”? Its roots are related to POWER, to being ABLE TO DO SOMETHING; and your time at GSS has been about becoming powerful people in the sense of people who know the power and capacity of your whole person: your

minds, your hearts, your bodies, and your souls. As you have become graduates today, you celebrate the many ways in which you have learned to reach your fullest potential, your MAGIS.

PERSISTENCE—Each of you has had to acquire the virtue of persistence in reaching this day. Persistence is about doing things over and over again until you get them right. For some of you that may have been hardest in math, for others in English, for others in history or science. For many, persistence has been the key to surviving Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. And, for others, PERSISTENCE may have had to do with getting out of bed on time, studying hard, keeping silence when you had to, being able to speak up in front of the class, and not disrespecting your teachers, parents, or classmates.

You have learned persistence here from your teachers, your family, your classmates, and everyone who has worked hard to make this day happen. You also have learned it from God, who has persistently loved you every day of your life, no matter what you may have done.

The PERSISTENCE you have learned here will be necessary for the challenges that lie ahead of you in high school, college, and even in law school, medical school,

business, ministry, and/or marriage and family life. But you already have learned persistence—this graduation is proof of that—and there is no reason to doubt that you can reach much higher goals (“magis”) for yourself in the years to come.

FAMILY—Each of you is here today because of family. Your family has worked with you and worked for Good Shepherd School to make today a reality. And they are very proud of you today. But you also have added to your family while you have been here at GSS: now your family includes the teachers, staff, board, and your classmates and their families too.

The mission statement of GSS talks about “a strong sense of community within the one family of God...” Just as your family has been expanded to include many other people, so too your own responsibilities as family members have grown. Just as so many other people have helped you to arrive at this wonderful day, so too now everyone is looking to you to be a contributor to the larger family around you: to this school, to your neighborhood, to this city, to this nation, and even to the world community. We are all part of the one family of God and our responsibility as family members now extends to all God’s people, God’s family.

HOPE—We hear a lot about faith, hope, and charity. The one that we probably reflect on the least is HOPE. Yet, your graduation is a product of many HOPES: your family’s hopes for you, your teachers’ hopes for your learning, your own hopes about what you can do with your life, and the hopes of the board members and benefactors of GSS for this school.

A famous poet from Czechoslovakia named VACLAV HAVEL once wrote this about hope:

Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul, ... It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart ...

Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.

Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out ... It is this hope, above all, which gives us the

strength to live and continually try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now.

I have always loved this last sentence because, when he wrote this, his country was under a communist dictatorship, which is why he speaks of “hopeless conditions.” Yet, three years later, what he and others had hoped for and worked for during their lives came to be: communism collapsed and they were free again.

This poet—Vaclav Havel—actually was elected president in a free election a few years later.

So, no matter how difficult things may seem to you in the years ahead, the gift which you have received during your time here at GSS—the gift of hope—can sustain you and make it possible for dreams to come true if you remain true to your hopes and dreams and to the dreams and hopes of your family at GSS.