

Archbishop Mansell, Dr. Griffin, Father Gary, Father Hector, Reverend Fathers, administration, faculty, parents, families, friends and the Class of 2017, I would like to thank you all for being here tonight in celebration of the commencement of St. Paul Catholic High School's Class of 2017. I would like to thank our President Mr. Dupont and our teachers and staff at St. Paul for the countless hours they have spent in making this moment possible. Also, I want to give a big thank you to my family and friends that are here tonight, especially my mom, dad, and two brothers José and Joshua because without their love and support I would not be where I am today. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to congratulate you, the Class of 2017, my classmates, my teammates, and most of all my friends on this great accomplishment and incredible milestone in our lives! It is truly an honor to be standing before you tonight and addressing a class full of the most gifted and promising young adults that I have been privileged to work with over these past four years.

It is a special time to be a falcon. This year we celebrate St. Paul's 50th anniversary. We have had the chance to reflect on our 50th anniversary motto, which has two distinct parts. This motto has been printed on all of our game jerseys, much of our school apparel, and each of our Senior Sweatshirts. The first part reads "honoring our past." This is something that we have all had the chance to do whether it be through Mr. Crowley's "this week in St. Paul history" or by

remembering the achievements of those who have graduated before us, whom for many of us include our parents and siblings. The second part of this 50th anniversary motto is “shaping our future.” Now, shaping our future is something that most of us, including myself don’t really think about. However, it is something that we are currently doing and will continue to do as we embark on the next step of our lives. With every step we take, every word we speak, and every action we perform, we are shaping our future. It is up to us to ensure that the future we shape is one that we want our children and families to live in. One that values basic human dignity, one that provides equal opportunity for all of God’s children, one where our planet is protected, and most of all one that we are proud to live in. I am confident that our five core values: faith, character, community, excellence, and service serving as the foundation of our lives will enable us to leave the world better than we found it.

My proposal to all of you, my fellow classmates, is one that contains three parts. These three steps have unconsciously been the guiding principles in my life, and it wasn’t until I was thinking of what to say to you tonight that I realized the significance they have played in my success thus far. The first is to set high, sometimes even seemingly unattainable, goals. I’m sure we can all remember entering St. Paul freshman year and being tasked by guidance with coming up with our SMART goals for our high school career. When it came to filling out the

academic portion of these SMART goals, I can remember thinking to my naïve, yet ambitious 14 year old self, “I want to graduate at the top of my class.” At the time it seemed like a wonderful, smooth path, so long as I stuck to my plan. However, as with most long-term goals, this one came with its share of obstacles. While playing sports, serving as your Class President, being involved in my community, and enjoying time with family and friends, I would often find myself in a late night battle between my desire to sleep and my desire to accomplish my goals. As with any goal you set, adversity will strike, commitments will get in the way, and sometimes the path to success will no longer be the most desirable path.

This is when the second step becomes integral to accomplishing your goals. This is finding your purpose. There is an underlying purpose behind every goal that we set, and it is this purpose that will keep you going when the path to success gets obscured. What wakes you up every morning motivated to improve your life and the lives of others? It is paramount that you find this purpose, or as my father likes to call it your “why.” For me, when I set my goal freshmen year to graduate as the valedictorian, I knew there was a bigger picture, and this was my why. My grandparents never had the opportunity to experience what a high school or college education could do and the doors that it would open. So when my parents were growing up they knew that they wanted better and both became the first in their families to graduate from high school. They then made the financial sacrifice to

send my older brother and me to St. Paul. Recognizing that it was my turn to accomplish a milestone and that I would be part of the first generation in my family to graduate from a four year college, I understood that I had a responsibility to all those who came before me to strive to do my best. This was and still remains my why. I thus challenge you to find your purpose, find your reason to make a difference. Then use this to make advancements every day. Every day take one step closer to achieving your dreams because your dreams will take time to become reality.

Lastly, it is important that we have faith and trust in God. When we leave here, we will enter a new world in which we will have the power to achieve great things, but only if we trust in God. As the Bible tells us in Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.” Before I arrived at St. Paul, I had already established a great group of friends in my hometown, many of whom I am still close with today. Coming to St. Paul and leaving everything I already knew behind to start a new journey took a great deal of trust in God. But, looking back on the last four years, the bonds that we have created, and everything that we have accomplished, I can stand here before you today and say that it was the best decision I could have made. Whether it be in

making minor or major life decisions, the power in trusting in God is not to be underestimated.

When we leave here tonight, many of us will go on to pursue higher education, some with hopes of pursuing a professional career. Some of us will decide to dedicate their lives to service to our country and some of us will take on a trade. In whichever case, we will all play an integral role in society and have the opportunity to not only honor our past, but shape our future. So set your goals high, find your purpose, and trust in God and each of us will make a positive difference in the world! Thank you!