

Valedictorian Address 2021 by Emma Schatz

Monsignor Simone, Father Prygocki, Father Glen, Deacon Collins, (other invited priests), Mrs. Mara, Mr. Dupont, Mr. Cooper, Mr. Wallace, faculty, families, friends, and the graduating class of 2021, good evening and welcome to our graduation celebration. It's an honor to stand before you today, and I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the administration, faculty, and staff of St. Paul for their dedication and hard work which has prepared us for this moment and beyond. To my fellow graduates, I would like to extend a warm congratulations to each and every one of you as we share in this momentous achievement. I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the role that my family has played in bringing me here today. To my parents: all I can say is thank you. You have both been my fiercest supporters, cheering me on from soccer games to awards nights. And to my four sisters: you all are my inspiration and joy, thank you for being my built in best friends. I would like to acknowledge all of my classmate's families: the parents, grandparents, guardians, and siblings that helped each and every one of us get to this point. On behalf of my peers, we thank you. (Applause)

Until this moment, our entire lives have been scripted. In elementary school they were preparing us for middle school, and in middle school they were preparing us for high school. And in high school, they were preparing us for our futures. I can still hear Mrs. McGuire saying, "You know, they won't let you get away with this in college".

Now we are looking out into the rest of our lives. Just last week we had to ask if we could use the bathroom, and now we are asked to make choices that may have radical impacts on our futures.

And of course we are reminded that we don't have to have everything figured out, and that's probably true. But we can't escape the fact that the choices we are making here and now will impact the next few years of our lives at least.

And that is *stressful!* Especially for someone like me, who needs specific directions in order to succeed. I mean, the most unscripted thing I do is a late night target run with my sister Anna...and by late night I mean 8 pm. Needing directives makes it difficult to live in a society where we are overwhelmed by choice. I can't even watch a movie with my family because we spend so much time scrolling through all the options.

There are over 5300 colleges in the US, not counting some technical or vocational schools. And that doesn't even begin to cover the literal millions of possible jobs we could have after high school, including the various branches of the military.

My advice for you tonight comes from the lesson I learned when I had to make these difficult choices about my future. As we all began looking towards our lives after high school, I was terrified. I'm serious, I had no idea what I wanted or what I was doing. In junior year I even took a poll of what I should do with my life. Underwater basket weaving has the most votes right now, but I'm still open to suggestions. I had friends who had known since freshman year that they wanted to be surgeons, or psychologists, or journalists. And they were taking steps to achieve those goals. Then I realized: I could do the same thing. Maybe I didn't have a set goal, but I could take steps to prepare myself for a variety of different outcomes. I took challenging history courses, but also math and science classes. Without knowing what my future may hold, I just did the next things I could. I wasn't the only one who did this. Colin and Richard also tried to

prepare themselves for a variety of fields by taking Gallic War Strategies 101... oh sorry I mean AP Latin. Still not sure what that was preparing them for, they'll have to get back to us in a couple years. And my dad has been preparing himself for his non-existent comedy career since the 5th grade by using the same made up joke that no one understands. Please ask him about it after the ceremony, it *will* make his day

There are so many unforeseen circumstances in life that we cannot control. We all know this first hand. These challenges have the potential to help us as well as impede us. We can't control these things, but what we can control is our actions and attitudes as we guide our own progress to bring us to where we want to be. Accepting the uncontrollable allows us to discover the ways in which we *can* exert control over situations. For example, going into the state tournament, the lacrosse team can't control who they will face. But they can make the choice to practice their hardest in order to prepare themselves for any opponent. Good luck to the boys in their game tomorrow, go falcons! Our future is always unknown, but we can make the best choice at the time to prepare for the next day. And that's how we build the script for our future.

Writing your own script is certainly a daunting task. In facing this, my words of wisdom for you comes from my sister Kara's favorite movie: Frozen 2. In this movie Anna says, "Just do the next right thing". We don't have to know what the end looks like or exactly how to get there. Progress isn't linear. In our lives, we will face challenges: from academic assignments, to athletic competitions, to artistic pursuits, to developing new friendships. At first glance, these tasks may seem insurmountable. It's so easy, and at times more appealing, to just avoid these difficult choices and tasks. But doing nothing is a choice in and of itself. And frankly, it is always the worst choice. Don't be

like my family on movie night, frozen by all the options. Just take one step, in the direction you think is best. And then take one more step after that. Truly, all we *can* do is the next right thing.

In choosing the next best step, there are so many possible ways our lives can go. When we look at the big picture, we can get overwhelmed. So it's okay to just look at the small picture. When you are faced with these challenges take a step back and think: what is the one thing I can do right now to address this? Not to finish the whole thing or even to guarantee success, but what is the next best step for me to take in this moment. And then do it.

Taking the first step may seem difficult at times. However, St. Paul has built us around our 5 core values of faith, character, community, excellence, and service, and has sculpted us into intelligent and capable individuals. So trust yourself. The choice you make is already better than nothing. As you head out into the world and face the completely blank canvas of your future, don't be afraid to take it one step at a time. I promise you something good will come of it.

You have the foundation of knowledge, character, and faith that you need. And you have to trust that you can discern where God is calling you. You have all the tools, so be confident in taking the next step. I look forward to seeing the script that each of you will write as you do the next right thing.