

Welcome family, teachers, administrators... oh and let's not forget about the graduating class of 2022

We are one team here at St. Francis DeSales. Our parents send us to school with a purpose and our teachers do all they can to fulfill that purpose. So, to begin my speech, we students extend our thanks to everybody who has played a role in providing us the resources needed to get the most out of our time here. This includes Mr. Garrick, Mr. Jones, Mr. Dvorak, Mr. Heil, Mrs. Shelton, Moms, Dads, Guardians and all of our outstanding teachers.

Today is your day. Everyone gathered in this stadium is here to celebrate your survival of the most refining years of your life, characterized by faith, family, tradition, and mother's club bake sales.

I am so proud of our student body. And I'm not just talking about the state champions, merit scholars, student leaders, or those who successfully avoided Steller in their illegal sweatshirts; I am also referring to those who faced their fears, prioritized their mental health, followed their individual callings, and those who continue to silently struggle.

Every student here exemplifies such unique talents derived from our different backgrounds; and I wouldn't call it "luck" that we all chose to attend the same school, St. Francis DeSales. There is a reason why we all exist together at the same place, at the same time. In the beginning, our student body could be described as a bunch of different friend groups separated by race, beliefs, hobbies, or past experiences. I am glad to see that we have learned to prioritize the family aspect of our community.

And for that, I want to thank our director of diversity and student equity, Mr. Scott, for being the voice of those who felt scared to speak their truth. We were all so moved by him and SOBE's, or the student organization for black empowerment, attention to detail in our school's first ever black history month assembly. Everybody was moved by the words Kendall Robinson spoke regarding black injustice. And we were all honored to hear a poem from our "Poetry Out Loud" state champion and "Smoke King" Pius Edzie. We here at DeSales are truly lucky. Diversity is the difference this school has, and the difference this world needs.

It was through our conflicts that we were able to birth some of the greatest traditions at DeSales. I remember as a freshman being completely taken back by my first ever World Cultures Assembly. Seeing others represent their ethnicities so proudly was a huge factor in developing my love for culture; so much so, that I somehow racked up the courage to represent Korean-pop dancing with my dance group; I am so proud of my Inferna Girls! Not to mention, it was truly an honor to get to dance in the same assembly as the iconic R-movement, an African dance group led by the talented Nana Awuah and Deborah Orgen!

I also want to extend my gratitude to Mr. Garrick for constantly putting up with us and having the mental capacity to remember over 900 names. I'm not sure how he does it. In all seriousness though, Mr. Garrick is the true head of this whole operation. You can tell he truly loves his job in the way he greets his students in the halls, listens to our problems, and brings our visions to life. He would be at all of our student council meetings, constantly building upon our ideas and communicating with us as equals.

However, today is not only about reminiscing our glory days as young high schoolers, but rather also about looking into our futures as adults.

The mindsets and habits we practice now will translate into our adult lives. And let me tell you, we teenagers don't have the greatest of either. This year specifically, the combination of COVID and the "where are you going to college?" questions definitely kept some of us up late at night. Personally, my biggest obstacle in my high school career has to be using comparison as a measure of my success.

What I've learned while at Desales is that when you are constantly comparing your achievements to those of another, you never truly do Justice to yourself or to the other person. In a sense, you are

reducing the whole of the person to just one of their many talents. In high school, I became so focused on achieving more than those above me that I ended up losing sight of my own vision for the future.

The straight As, esteemed titles, and the so-called “perfect life” gave me a certain reputation among my peers that I felt pressured to maintain...and I did maintain it. In doing this, my life became a lot harder. Though the timing is unfortunate, I realize now that I sacrificed too much just so my name could be the first one listed in the quarterly honor roll postings. And through that, I became a stranger to mistakes, not knowing how to handle failure in a healthy manner.

But the day before this speech was due, one of my closest friends said something that I immediately wrote down... she said, “don’t limit yourself to one path.” Why, as humans, do we expect perfection from ourselves when it can’t be guaranteed? I still don’t have an answer to this question, but being surrounded by such an amazing community taught me that you are not defined by your major, your sport, or whatever your craft is; and you are definitely not defined by how well you excel at these ultimately meaningless things.

I recall when Mr. Sheumaker taught our psychology class that our minds can make us act irrationally. But our minds can also adapt to our different needs as we develop. I bring this up because when things take a turn for the worse, we should always be opened to a change of plans. And though we can’t change the outcomes of certain events, we CAN change our attitudes towards those events. And after much practice, we can free ourselves from being defined by our abilities or our lack thereof. Now knowing that, I sit here questioning why I cared about having the best English grade when I plan on majoring in science!

We spent the last four years doing what we could to ensure that our future selves would be alright. And by the looks of it, I think we did a pretty good job. When COVID rained on our parade, we were only sophomores; my mom was still driving me to school every morning. Our class cheered at the extended spring break, but the juniors and seniors suffered a huge shift in their high school experience. They couldn’t have a proper prom or graduation to celebrate all of their hard work.

However, our class got lucky, but we also put in the work to rejuvenate our passions. Now we are stepping into the next chapter of our lives. And whether that’s in college, the armed forces, trade school, or a gap year, I hope to meet again. And when that time comes, I hope to hear about how your student ambassador training made you quite the social butterfly in college; or how AP Chemistry taught you that maybe you can’t excel at everything.

Class of 2022, we are blessed. Not everyone gets to go to a high school where your hard work and passions are cultivated each and every day. Together, faculty and students, we have dug through the darkness of an unprecedented pandemic experience and have found the light of a future full of promise.

Now, we Stallions are storming the nation. From Los Angeles, California, to Boston, Massachusetts, from Chicago, Illinois, to Tampa, Florida – north, south, east, west – and even here in Ohio, the Heart of it All – we will take what we have learned from this humble school and we will do good – and we will be great!

Class of 2022 Congratulations.