



INTEGRITAS

Wyoming Catholic College

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“YOU ARE GOD-MADE MEN AND WOMEN!”

BY BISHOP DAVID L. RICKEN, DD, JCL

BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

(DELIVERED AT COMMENCEMENT, MAY 11TH, 2019)



I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Arbery for his invitation to be with the 2019 graduating class—and the entire community of Wyoming Catholic College. It is such an honor and privilege to be with you and to be asked to speak at this very important time in your life. This college arose from a deep pastoral need shortly after I was appointed the Bishop in Cheyenne. I was concerned that it is difficult for the Church to stay connected to today’s youth and young adults. I thought there was something missing in how we explained the Catholic faith to them as they began their lifelong journey in it. Recognizing this challenge, I began to consider what we could do about it. After several discussions with Dr. Robert Carlson and Fr. Bob Cook, we decided to provide a special week of formation in faith, liturgy, and community on Casper Mountain, called “The Wyoming School of Catholic Thought.” We brought in speakers and a religious community to help provide beautiful liturgies, giving the young adults and families a taste of the Catholic tradition. At the end of the week, our students offered a clear message. They wanted and needed a Catholic college in Wyoming.

My first response was total skepticism. We had so few financial and personnel resources that it seemed impossible. But we prayed a lot and continued to explore the possibility. As I look back now on all that has happened since then, I am deeply humbled by the abundance of God’s provision and the deep faith of all those who have made this college a reality: “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Ps 127:1).

In his Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, St. John Paul II describes the purpose of a Catholic university as guiding the youth “to think rigorously so as to act rightly and to serve humanity better.” In the education it has imparted to you, Wyoming Catholic College has abundantly fulfilled this exhortation. Both you and the College are part of the new springtime which JPII predicted. Both you and the College are the small new plants, sprouting through the dead underbrush, to bring strong, vibrant life into the world.

You have received a privileged experience here, but with this privilege comes responsibility. In 1 Corinthians 8:1, St. Paul warns of the potential dangers of a superior education: “Knowledge puffs up.” But despite your rigorous education, Wyoming Catholic College students have earned a reputation for joy and humility. Perhaps it is because of the unique outdoor program, which keeps you in touch with your mortality and reminds you of your place in creation before the Creator. It instills the fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom. Wyoming Catholic College students also have the ability to speak with anyone, regardless of his views or background, and to accompany him a few steps on his journey toward truth. Perhaps this comes from the discussion format through which you approached your studies; it has trained you to be “all things to all men” that “by all means [you] might save some” (1 Cor 9:22). But what has above all produced this “enlargement” of soul (which Blessed John Henry Newman says must be the effect of a successful Catholic university experience) is the fact that every day, your course schedule enabled you to live a sacramental life of Mass, confession, and adoration. We must always remember that although St. Paul says, “Knowledge puffs up,” he continues, “Charity builds up.” Only through an authentic love of the Master can you avoid becoming merely proud academics through the education you have received here.

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In *The Idea of a University*, Bl. John Henry Newman envisions the many benefits students could receive by studying in an environment ordered to developing the whole person. When describing the spiritual and intellectual growth produced by a truly Catholic liberal arts university, Newman speaks from his reason, his imagination, and his hopes, but you have experienced these benefits first-hand during your years at Wyoming Catholic College. Yet we can learn much more from Newman's own life about the mission you will undertake after leaving Wyoming Catholic. He was an Oxford intellectual whose study of history and the Church fathers led to his conversion from Evangelicalism to Anglicanism, and ultimately to Catholicism; his Oxford Movement occasioned the same trajectory of conversion for many of his contemporaries. As an Anglican priest and Oxford professor, he knew he would lose his job through converting to Catholicism, but once he saw that his search for truth led to the Catholic Church, his intellectual honesty would not allow him to do otherwise. Many years before, he had formed the habit of trust in Christ, as he expresses in his famous poem, "Lead Kindly Light":

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th' encircling gloom;
 lead Thou me on!
 The night is dark, and I am far from home;
 lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene; one step enough for me.

Thus Newman found himself in a dark place, not knowing which way to go; yet he trusted that, no matter how dim things might seem, Christ would lead him to safety. At some point of our lives, we will each have the same experience, and this faith is a defining quality of a Christian. Yet understood more generally, it is also characteristic of every pioneer and every student. A kind of general faith (apart from the theological virtue) must be present in anyone who aspires to something beyond himself. Every pioneer operates from a form of faith. You discovered this in the outdoors: if you wanted to go further and higher, you relied on someone to lead you as you went into new frontiers.

Further, faith means holding something as true that you have never seen for yourself, because you trust the one who tells you. Each of us daily exercises this faith (as when I trust my sister's word that there is milk in the fridge), but it is especially the position of every student. Here at Wyoming Catholic College, you may be less aware of this dynamic, because your education is built not on textbooks but on a direct encounter with great minds. You did not take your professors' words on trust, because you came to the truth directly through reading the great minds of civilization—Augustine, Aristotle, Aquinas, Homer, Dante. Nevertheless, you trusted your professors as guides to grappling with the truth, just as you trusted your wilderness leaders in the outdoors.

This same trust of a person is at the heart of faith as a theological virtue. Because we trust Jesus, we hold everything he said as true, from “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life” to “On this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Our faith does not just mean believing whatever he says, but also trusting him to guide us along the way, as Newman did.

I have had my own experience similar to Newman's, and like his, mine resulted in a prayer that has helped me ever since. As we were beginning to seriously move forward with founding the College, I was very concerned about our lack of financial resources. Though many things had almost supernaturally fallen into place, we were at a fundraising standstill. One beautiful afternoon, I was travelling to Lander by myself, and complaining to the Lord as I wondered if I had misread his will. I do not often hear voices, but suddenly I heard someone say sternly, “Get out of my way.” Within a few seconds, I realized that the Lord was correcting me for obstructing what he wanted for the College. Through my worrying, I was the obstacle to the College's founding. Then, out of a spirit of obedience to Our Lord and Our Lady, I asked God's forgiveness and started to pray. Realizing that I was getting in the way of God's will, this prayer came into my mind, almost as if I were reading it from a screen: “Lord, help me to do Your Will.” When I realized I was trying to do more than he wanted, I prayed: “Nothing more

and nothing less.” I complained that it was taking so long, and the next two phrases came: “Lord, help me to do your will, not a moment sooner nor a moment later than You will it.” The whole simple prayer (now called the Wyoming Prayer) reads: “Lord, help me to do your will: nothing more, nothing less. Lord, help me to do your will: not a moment sooner or a moment later than you will it.”

I hope that the Wyoming Prayer can help you remember that you are “God-made” men and women, and that the only way to be happy in life is to align your will with your loving Father’s. As you transition to life after college, you will face a world that idolizes the notion of being “self-made,” and tells you that you will be walked over if you don’t assert your own will. The irony of chasing the idol of individualism is that it often makes us lose our identities, as Pope Francis notes in his recent exhortation, *Christus Vivit*. He quotes Ven. Carlo Acutis, a young man who died from leukemia at the age of 15, who said, “Everyone is born as an original, but many people end up dying as photocopies.” Our Holy Father then explains how to avoid this fate: “You can become what God your Creator knows you are only if you realize that you are called to something greater. Ask the help of the Holy Spirit and confidently aim for the great goal of holiness. In this way, you will not be a photocopy. You will be fully yourself.”

I want to close by addressing one more challenge ahead of you. In *Ex Corde Ecclesia*, St. John Paul II says that “a Catholic University’s privileged task is ‘to unite . . . the search for truth, and the certainty of already knowing the fount of truth.’” Like John Henry Newman, you have lived the union of this search and this certainty. As you leave Wyoming Catholic College, you are called to continue uniting them. You have probably already been asked how you will survive the “real” world after you have experienced this oasis of truth, beauty, and goodness. You know how to answer this misguided remark: it is here that you have encountered what is real. You have been immersed in real conversations, not social media; you have had real friendships, not Facebook friends; you’ve studied real truth, not fake news; you’ve pursued real virtue, not virtual reality. You have contemplated real life—what

man was really made for. Above all, you've encountered the Real Presence—the most real thing on our planet. Even as our culture loses touch with reality, you have spent four years experiencing it. Now your mission is to carry that reality with you and bring it to others. You must become “missionaries of hope.”

In *The Idea of a University*, Newman reminds us that “good is not only good, but reproductive of good . . . Nothing is excellent, beautiful, perfect, desirable for its own sake, but it overflows, and spreads the likeness of itself all around it.” Where will you spread the likeness of your good? Previous graduates are bringing their joy and humility into every field: they have entered the medical profession, law enforcement, teaching, business, religious life. They are becoming mothers and fathers. Where will you bring the light that has been shared with you here? It is a tremendous task, but we can learn from Newman's example. Like the man in the Gospel who says, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24), we can be sure that by trusting the Fount of Truth, we will be led forward in our search for truth.

In many ways, this College is a living miracle. The first friends, the first donors, the first students and their parents, the first professors, Holy Rosary Parish, the Knights of Columbus, the wonderful community of Lander, the gift of the land—all these were signs to me that God wanted the College, and that Our Lady would walk beside us as we took each step of faith into the unknown. As you cross the stage today into the next phase of your life, may you do so with the confident trust that the same faithful God is ready to walk with you into the unknown. *Sic laudetur Jesus Christus.*

The Most Reverend David L. Ricken was ordained a priest in the Diocese of Pueblo, Colorado, in September 1980. In 1987, he received his Licentiate degree (J.C.L.) from Pontifical Gregorian University; in 1990, he was named diocesan chancellor; and in 1996, he was nominated an official of the Congregation for Clergy in Rome. On January 6th, 2000, he was ordained to the episcopacy, becoming the Diocese of Cheyenne's seventh leader. During his tenure in Wyoming, Bishop Ricken helped found Wyoming Catholic College. He was installed as the twelfth bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay on August 28th, 2008. He is a member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and serves on the Pro-Life and Evangelization and Catechesis committees.

THE STORY OF OUR TIME AT WYOMING CATHOLIC COLLEGE

BY WILLIAM EBY ('19)

SENIOR CLASS SPEAKER AND GRADUATE

(DELIVERED AT COMMENCEMENT, MAY 11TH, 2019)



Parents of the graduating class, four years ago, many of you attended our matriculation ceremony, in which your children became the responsibility of Wyoming Catholic College. We call it “matriculation” because, in a sense, the college adopted us as sons and daughters—not replacing our true parents, but taking charge of a small part of our education. I am always amazed at the generosity of our parents, who delivered their most precious belongings—the product of eighteen years of labor—into the hands of strangers from Wyoming. The friendships that result from your gift have been a source of excellent conversation and deep joy for the entire school, and we can only disproportionately show our gratitude.

At that same ceremony four years ago, the faculty before you publicly recognized the solemnity and gravity of your gift, and responded with a promise which bound them to teach the truth in concert with the faith and never to practice sophistry. This is an immense and bold task: I can hardly comprehend the patience required to teach stubborn-hearted, opinionated, and equivocating youths. Nevertheless, they have successfully practiced their art, and even where their work is not yet complete, they have been graceful and charitable examples for their pupils.

In subsequent years, the rising sophomore, junior, and senior classes present here today have gone through their own process of adoption into Wyoming Catholic College. I think that their influence upon the graduates deserves the comparison found in Psalm 133:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell
in unity!

It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down
upon the beard,

upon the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!

Today, we see the conclusion of the covenant made four years ago at matriculation. Now that our time here is complete, our professors have made their final efforts, and our parents will embrace their children. As the students say goodbye to one another, the graduates will be left asking themselves, “What comes next?” Allow me to expound this question.

In our freshman theology course, Dr. Holmes gave us a brief lecture on the nature of stories and storytelling, telling us how all good stories are held together by an inherent unity or completeness. At the time, we were struggling through the Old Testament in our Salvation History course, working to uncover the meaning it held for its original audience. Dr. Holmes explained our difficulty: A story is not understandable until its conclusion. We cannot see why the middle chapters are important until we discover their consequences at the story’s end. The unity of a story is thus the interrelation of its parts as they blend to form a single idea, with no part either absent or irrelevant. Our difficulty with the Old Testament, he concluded, was that we wanted to understand the middle without the end—the coming of Christ, which the Old Testament could only anticipate, though for us it is in the past.

Like those reading the Old Testament after Christ, today’s forty-two graduates have happily lived in a story whose conclusion we have known for the past four years. Step by step, we have worked to attain the goal we achieve and commemorate today. In a literal sense, graduation is the end of our four-year story. It has made our story coherent by giving it a final cause, an ending. Yet, now that we have attained this goal, we cannot know what shape or form the rest of our lives will take. It is a bit like trying to interpret the Old Testament without Christ.

“What comes next?” The short answer is not what those who just finished school would hope. It is to do what we have done for the past four years—to continue the quest for truth, to keep the faith, and to never forget our neighbors in these pursuits. The story of our time

at Wyoming Catholic College will continue to reappear under new disguises as long as there is something new to learn, new virtues to develop, and new people with whom to do it. The novelties afforded by circumstances, such as new jobs, new books, and new homes, are only superficial, but the disparity between the truth and our opinions always endures. Ecclesiastes' logic never loses its relevance: "What has been is what will be / And what has been done is what will be done; / There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9). History repeats itself, and our stories on this earth are no exception. Though we may not always commit the same errors, we will never find that we are without more imperfections to purify.

At face value, this seems to offer only a dim and desperate view for our future, but it has two positive consequences which we must note. First, it responds to a common objection raised against liberal education. The liberal arts are impractical, imprudent, and have nothing to do with life in the real world. What we learn in the classroom has little relevance to life outside that context; thus we should regret it as a missed opportunity. On the contrary, the liberal artist will always do the same things he was doing at school—whether or not he is an economic success is another question. If he loved philosophy while at school, then he will philosophize after graduation. If he read novels, then he will continue reading them after graduation. If he stayed up all night firing shotguns at burning pianos instead of doing homework, then he will likewise do this after graduation. Whatever the case may be, the graduate of Wyoming Catholic College leaves school with a habit of learning that will accompany him the rest of his days under the sun.

Second, our graduates are not alone in their seemingly interminable pursuit of truth and virtue. There is a long tradition, beginning with the Greek philosophers, of men willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of the good. In a famous passage from *The Apology*, Socrates, on trial for corrupting the youth, explains to the jury why he acts as a questioner and gadfly: "I have a divine sign. . . . It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do" (31e). When the Athenian jury threatens to execute Socrates for his crimes, he responds: "Men of Athens, I am

grateful, and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy” (29d). Socrates’ fate after this trial reminds us that the tradition we entered four years ago at matriculation is not safe, but will always encounter enemies willing to attack the truth and its agents.

But to talk only of the dangers of philosophy is to tell only half of the story. The other half is less pessimistic. When we enter the Socratic tradition, we enter the realm Dr. Holmes introduced us to freshman year—the tradition of storytelling. And one of the first narratives to appear in this tradition was a love story. You probably never thought of Plato as a writer of romances. Well, he is—and his plot structure has become one of the most replicated in the genre. Boy meets girl and falls in love with her because of her beautiful proportions in limb and face. Later, the boy realizes the limitations of her physical beauty and begins looking elsewhere, to find other and better instantiations of beauty in her virtues and soul. And then, entranced by the more perfect beauty present in ideas and customs, he ditches the girl to study law or politics instead. Yet even here he is unsatisfied with the beauty he encounters and continues searching until he finds that:

It will not appear to him as one idea or one kind of knowledge. It is not anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else, but itself, by itself, with itself, it is always in one form; and all the other beautiful things share in that . . . This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty...[and] in the end comes to know what it is to be beautiful (211c).

In other words, Plato is saying that our stories do not simply repeat themselves, but that there is an ending or conclusion that justifies all the toil of the beginning and middle parts. Though some elements will reappear in the end, they will not repeat in a fatalistic or discouraging fashion.

C. S. Lewis eloquently rephrases the same optimism about our stories in the last sentences of *The Last Battle*. Speaking of the end of his characters' lives in Narnia, he writes:

But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

And so, my friends and classmates, this is the consolation of a life of philosophy: that, even though we will soon leave one another, we may see each other again, and that, in spite of all our sufferings, our stories will—God willing—have a happy ending.

William Eby was selected by the members of his class to deliver the Senior Address, the Class of 2019's formal farewell to the Wyoming Catholic College community.

