



Assumption University

President Greg Weiner Remarks, Undergraduate Class of 2024 Commencement, Assumption University

Your Excellency Bishop McManus, Chairperson Race, Fr. Nguyen, Provost Guerra, Drs. Dominguez, Collins and DeMott, faculty colleagues, family and friends of our graduates, welcome to this celebration of the remarkable class before us. Moms, including my wife Rebecca just in case she's watching the livestream, happy Mother's Day.

It's traditional and appropriate at these ceremonies to ask the graduates to stand for a moment and offer applause and gratitude to all those who brought you to this day—your families, your friends, your faculty, and so many others. Please join me in doing so now.

But this is also a moment for us to be grateful to you. Would my faculty colleagues please join me in thanking our students for the gift of letting us teach you, for the gift of all you've taught us, and for the joy you bring to our work?

So here we are: You've finished your final exams, although the provost has yet to come to this microphone and confirm that you've passed them. Let's assume you have, because otherwise you're going to have some explaining to do to your parents up there in the rafters. You've paid your tuition. You and your families have given us four years of meaningful vocation and inspiration.

You may even have in your possession video of me singing All My Exes Live in Texas in Pierre's Pub, which gives you considerable leverage over me even though any video allegedly showing that episode is the product of an AI deepfake. And if it wasn't a deepfake, let the word go forth from this time and place that I pulled

my boots on, grabbed a microphone with two of my Texan friends, and we were awesome.

All that's behind us now. So I think it's safe—with our trustees on stage acting in their fiduciary roles, which may induce them to tackle me and remove me from the stage—to express what I really wish for you.

What I wish for you is a lifetime of ignorance. Before I explain, let me repeat: We already cashed your checks. And then let me clarify: I know you have learned so much. But I hope you also have a better sense today than you did four years ago of the immensity of all we have yet to discover.

I mean ignorance in a particular and joyful sense, the kind that is integral to the pursuit of truth. I would hardly attempt to discuss physics with Dr. Dominguez on the stage. But in his honor, allow me to quote a legendary physicist who taught at his alma mater: Richard Feynman.

Feynman once characterized physics as a discipline with, and I quote, "an expanding frontier of ignorance." That was not a lament. It was a celebration. He meant that each question that is answered gives geometric rise to more questions. A love of questions, what Socrates would call a confession of ignorance, is the mark of those who have mastered the intellectual virtues I hope we have imparted to you: intellectual courage and intellectual humility. These virtues are among the hallmarks of a successful Catholic liberal education. And they enable a love and pursuit of truth.

Those with intellectual courage are unafraid—indeed, they are eager—to ask questions that are big and bold. They have enough confidence in their own ideas to put them to the test of reasoned dispute. And they are brave enough to be the

one person in the room who will raise a hand and say—to the professor, to classmates, to work colleagues—“I think you’re wrong, and here’s why.”

Those with intellectual humility possess the converse virtues. They refuse to believe they already know all that can be known. They know that they, like others in the room, might be wrong. They welcome being told exactly what they would say to others who they thought were mistaken.

They know, as does the tradition of Catholic liberal education, that the human mind is a limited instrument and that faith is an act of humility. And humility and courage converge when an Assumption student says: I disagree with you so strongly, yet I am so aware I do not know everything, that there must be something I can learn from you.

These virtues are about what Assumption graduates have—grit—and what you lack: entitlement. They will serve you well in the workplace. They will also serve you in every other job you have: Citizen. Friend. Spouse. Parent. Teacher. And, for the rest of your lives, you, like all of us, will be a learner.

For those reasons, I would hire, befriend, pray with, vote for, study alongside, hang out with, even hit a whiffle ball thrown by, an Assumption graduate over a graduate of any institution of higher education in this country.

I value those qualities in you because I believe, and the scenes on other campuses in recent months confirm, that our society is experiencing a crisis of intellectual arrogance. It manifests in people so certain of their views they convey them in shouts—whether that shout expresses their own view or their conviction that no one else should be permitted to disagree.

There is another crisis that corresponds to that of intellectual arrogance, and that is a crisis of obligation. We are a society that is certain of what each of us deserves but indifferent to what any of us owes. But here, having spent four years

pursuing truth in the company of friends, you not only know we need and are obligated to one another—you also celebrate that fact. Like St. Augustine, we need friends who both encourage us and challenge us—and for whom friendship in its highest form, the pursuit of the common and highest goods, creates trust.

So here is my challenge: Be the answer to the twin crises of arrogance and obligation. Through the lifelong pursuit of truth in the company of friends, you will expand the frontiers of knowledge and, in doing so, rejoice in the frontiers of ignorance that expand even faster. Students at so many campuses are somehow already certain of everything. Graduates of Assumption have the courage and curiosity to want to know more.

Some of you have heard me say I'm not worried about the future of our country. Whatever our views, we are all worried about something today, and perhaps tomorrow.

But as for the future? Look around. Family, faculty, and friends of the Class of 2024, look at this sea of Assumption graduates—people who are curious and courageous, whose intellectual virtues induce them to listen and to learn, to act with conviction but also in a spirit of compromise, rising leaders who possess grit and lack entitlement. With our future in their hands, how could we feel anything but hope?

Are there universities with more ivy on the walls? Sure. Are there institutions with higher average scores on standardized tests? Maybe.

I wish them well. But the future belongs to Assumption graduates. It belongs to those who know what they deserve but also what they owe. It belongs to those who rejoice in learning and who see ignorance as opportunity. The future belongs

to greyhounds. For that, I am hopeful. And most of all, I am confident I speak for everyone in this arena when I say that, for the future your courage and humility will enable, we are grateful. Congratulations, and Roll Hounds.