



## COMING OF AGE



Your class has come of age at a moment of great consequence for our nation and for the world - a rare inflection point in history where the size and scope of the challenges before us require that we remake our world to renew its promise; that we align our deepest values and commitments to the demands of a new age. ... Moreover, no one person, or religion, or nation can meet these challenges alone. Our very survival has never required greater cooperation and greater understanding among all people from all places than at this moment in history.  
- Barack Obama, May 17, 2009, Addressing Notre Dame Graduates

### *Scripture:*

### **1 Thessalonians 2:9-13**

<sup>9</sup>You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. <sup>10</sup>You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers. <sup>11</sup>As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, <sup>12</sup>urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

<sup>13</sup>We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

### **Wisdom of Solomon 1:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth, think of the Lord in goodness and seek him with sincerity of heart; <sup>2</sup>because he is found by those who do not put him to the test, and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him. <sup>3</sup>For perverse thoughts separate people from God, and when his power is tested, it exposes the foolish; <sup>4</sup>because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin. <sup>5</sup>For a holy and disciplined spirit will flee from deceit, and will leave foolish thoughts behind, and will be ashamed at the approach of unrighteousness.

<sup>6</sup>For wisdom is a kindly spirit, but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words; because God is witness of their inmost feelings, and a true observer of their hearts, and a hearer of their tongues. <sup>7</sup>Because the spirit of the Lord has filled the world, and that which holds all things together knows what is said, <sup>8</sup>therefore those who utter unrighteous things will not escape notice, and justice, when it punishes, will not pass them by.



### **THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON**

Solomon prayed: "Give Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people and to know good and evil." (1 Kings 3:9)

"So God said to him, 'Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked...'" (1 Kings 3:11-12)

"The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart." (1 Kings 10:24)

### **THE TWO MOTHERS**

It was to Solomon that two mothers came to resolve a quarrel about which was the true mother of a baby. (One mother's baby died in the night and each claimed the surviving child as hers.) When Solomon suggested dividing the living child in two with a sword, the true mother was revealed to him because she was willing to give up her child to the lying woman rather than have the child killed.

Solomon then declared the woman who showed the compassion was the true mother, and gave the baby back to her.

Our lesson today begins the book of Solomon – a collection of wisdom sayings. And the first of all wisdom is reverence for God:

1. Love righteousness, you rulers of the earth; think of the Lord in goodness and seek him with sincerity of heart;
2. because he is found by those who do not put him to the test, and manifests himself to those who do not distrust him.
3. For perverse thoughts separate people from God, and when his power is tested, it exposes the foolish;
4. because wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, or dwell in a body enslaved to sin.
6. For wisdom is a kindly spirit, but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words; because God is witness of their inmost feelings, and a true observer of their hearts, and a hearer of their tongues.

**JESUS QUOTED SOLOMON:** Solomon was a sign, just as Jesus was a sign. Jesus himself quoted Solomon as a sign from God, saying that this holy wisdom brought the Queen of Sheba to Solomon in search of his council.

“The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the Wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!”  
Matthew 12:42

### **MEMORIAL DAY FESTIVITIES**

This is Memorial Day weekend. The flags are out along the streets in the cemetery. Connie Norris told me that once again she will be participating in Memorial Day services at Santa Rosa Memorial Park on Monday along with an ex-prisoner of war. Connie’s connection to the American Ex-prisoners of War from World War II makes her a community spokesperson on Memorial Day as well as friend of our church.

### **WHAT ARE WE CELEBRATING?**

Each year I have to rethink this holiday. I don’t have a standard Memorial Day sermon. So I ask continually, what are the ideals for which the soldiers were fighting? They were not fighting for one political administration vs. another. They were not fighting for one racial ethnic group, or one part of our country, or one social class. That’s all of us.

**NO PART OF AMERICA IS  
MORE AMERICAN THAN ANOTHER.**

People will stand up for their friends, people will defend their families. Patriotism -- on a national or even a global level -- is an outgrowth of these alliances. Do you think that someday global patriotism will replace national patriotism? Some of the problems we face are going to demand that it does. I’ll say more about that in a moment.

This year there is hope that the end of the wars is in sight. Forty million Americans have never lived in a time when we were not at war in Iraq and the surrounding countries. I hope we can let them experience peace.

The best tribute we can offer today for the people that Connie helps us remember, in World War II and other conflicts that are more recent, would be to remember to lift our thinking to being the kind of country that makes their sacrifice worthwhile.

### **OBAMA AT NOTRE DAME**

Last week President Barack Obama went to Notre Dame in Indiana following a tradition that has invited presidents to speak at commencement ceremonies for decades. He also spoke in Arizona. He joked that at Norte Dame that he was one for two in terms of receiving honorary degrees. Arizona trustees had said that his body of work was still ahead of him, so they didn’t believe that an honorary degree was appropriate.

I want to read some paragraphs from what the President said about the world into which the seniors graduate. It was a speech of both hope and reality. This is not a partisan speech. There are no respected commentators who have called it partisan. The implementation of the ideas could become partisan but the speech was not.

These ideas answer my question, what kind of country are we fighting for?

Here are some excerpts. I don’t have a teleprompter, but I’ll do the best I can.

### **COMING OF AGE AT AN HISTORIC MOMENT**

Your class has come of age at a moment of great consequence for our nation and for the world -- a rare inflection point in history where the size and scope of the challenges before us require that we remake our world to renew its promise; that we align our deepest values and commitments to the demands of a new age. It's a privilege and a responsibility afforded to few generations -- and a task that you're now called to fulfill.

## **PROSPERITY AND GREED**

This generation, your generation is the one that must find a path back to prosperity and decide how we respond to a global economy that left millions behind even before the most recent crisis hit -- an economy where greed and short-term thinking were too often rewarded at the expense of fairness, and diligence, and an honest day's work.

## **GLOBAL DIVERSITY**

Your generation must decide how to save God's creation from a changing climate that threatens to destroy it. Your generation must seek peace at a time when there are those who will stop at nothing to do us harm, and when weapons in the hands of a few can destroy the many. And we must find a way to reconcile our ever-shrinking world with its ever-growing diversity -- diversity of thought, diversity of culture, and diversity of belief.

## **CHALLENGES THAT DO NOT RECOGNIZE BORDERS**

In short, we must find a way to live together as one human family. And it's this last challenge that I'd like to talk about today. ... For the major threats we face in the 21st century -- whether it's global recession or violent extremism; the spread of nuclear weapons or pandemic disease -- these things do not discriminate. They do not recognize borders. They do not see color. They do not target specific ethnic groups.

## **A SINGLE GARMENT OF DESTINY**

Moreover, no one person, or religion, or nation can meet these challenges alone. Our very survival has never required greater cooperation and greater understanding among all people from all places than at this moment in history. Unfortunately, finding that common ground -- recognizing that our fates are tied up, as Dr. King said, in a "single garment of destiny" -- is not easy.

## **THE SOLDIER AND THE LAWYER LOVE WITH EQUAL PASSION**

The soldier and the lawyer may both love this country with equal passion, and yet reach very different conclusions on the specific steps needed to protect us from harm. The gay activist and the evangelical pastor may both deplore the ravages of HIV/AIDS, but find themselves unable to bridge the cultural divide that might unite their efforts. Those who speak out against stem cell research may be

rooted in an admirable conviction about the sacredness of life, but so are the parents of a child with juvenile diabetes who are convinced that their son's or daughter's hardships can be relieved.

## **WITHOUT DEMONIZING**

The question, then is how do we work through these conflicts? Is it possible for us to join hands in common effort? As citizens of a vibrant and varied democracy, how do we engage in vigorous debate? How does each of us remain firm in our principles, and fight for what we consider right, without demonizing those with just as strongly held convictions on the other side?

Now, understand -- understand, Class of 2009, I do not suggest that the debate surrounding abortion can or should go away. Because no matter how much we may want to fudge it -- indeed, while we know that the views of most Americans on the subject are complex and even contradictory -- the fact is that at some level, the views of the two camps are irreconcilable. Each side will continue to make its case to the public with passion and conviction. But surely we can do so without reducing those with differing views to caricature.

Open hearts. Open minds. Fair-minded words. It's a way of life that has always been the Notre Dame tradition.

## **A LIGHTHOUSE AND A CROSSROADS**

And in this world of competing claims about what is right and what is true, have confidence in the values with which you've been raised and educated. Be unafraid to speak your mind when those values are at stake. Hold firm to your faith and allow it to guide you on your journey. In other words, stand as a lighthouse.

## **DOUBT AT THE CROSSROADS**

But remember, too, that you can be a crossroads.

**Remember, too, that the ultimate irony of faith is that it necessarily admits doubt.  
It's the belief in things not seen.  
It's beyond our capacity as human beings to know with certainty what God has planned for us or what He asks of us. And those of us who believe must trust that His wisdom is greater than our own.**

And this doubt should not push us away from our faith. But it should humble us. It should temper our passions, cause us to be wary of too much self-righteousness. It should compel us to remain open and curious and eager to continue the spiritual and moral debate that began for so many of you within the walls of Notre Dame. And within our vast democracy, this doubt should remind us even as we cling to our faith to persuade through reason, through an appeal whenever we can to universal rather than parochial principles, and most of all through an abiding example of good works and charity and kindness and service that moves hearts and minds.

For if there is one law that we can be most certain of, it is the law that binds people of all faiths and no faith together. It's no coincidence that it exists in Christianity and Judaism; in Islam and Hinduism; in Buddhism and humanism. It is, of course, the Golden Rule - the call to treat one another as we wish to be treated. The call to love. The call to serve. To do what we can to make a difference in the lives of those with whom we share the same brief moment on this Earth.

### **WHY IS THIS A GREAT SPEECH?**

It is great because it contains great ideas. There are some essays that are floating around on the Internet and one of them that reached my desk points out the greatness of the speech to the graduates at Notre Dame.

#### **WHO HAS GIVEN US THESE THINGS?**

**It is the VETERAN,  
not the preacher,  
who has given us freedom of religion.**

**It is the VETERAN,  
not the reporter,  
who has given us freedom of the press.**

**It is the VETERAN,  
not the campus organizer,  
who has given us freedom to assemble.**

**It is the VETERAN,  
not the lawyer,  
who has given us the right to a fair trial.**

**It is the VETERAN,  
not the politician,  
Who has given us the right to vote.**

Each of us serves the cause of freedom as best we can. These statements do not hold up under analysis. It is insensitive for people to say one response to freedom is less worthy than another.

To be truly free, we must honor the diversity of our gifts, rather than dividing ourselves into those who are patriotic and those who are less so. We can do better than that. We must do better than that. Anything less diminishes the value of those who fought for our freedom. People may disagree, but that is no reason for us to fight among ourselves.

We have come through a long and divisive period in our country. We are not yet completely past it. There are some who would want to continue with that level of confrontation because by fighting against something, they believe that they might be fighting for something. Fighting is all they know. But it is not all WE know.

### **SETTING A HIGH MARK**

This speech sets a high mark for dialog in our country. Declaring enemies is not the same as solving problems, and not the same as working for peace.

This year, more than ever, let us be peacemakers. May God give us

- the wisdom of Solomon,
- the compassion of Jesus Christ,
- the energy of the Holy Spirit.

Let us set our sights higher than the horizons that we can see with the unaided eye, because many of the challenges that lie ahead do not recognize international borders.

United we will stand, and divided we will fall. Those whom we honor this weekend deserve no less.



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