Fr. Euteneuer, Prof. Rice, Mrs. Bethel, Dr. O’Donnell, Dr. Snyder, reverend fathers, distinguished faculty, fellow graduates, parents, family, and friends of the class of 2010:

Goodbye.

We are approaching that part of graduation that makes many people say that graduation is like death: we are all about to take our leave from one another and depart. There are a number of superficial similarities between the two, graduation and death. At the beginning of our lives here as freshmen, we came with the excitement and the exuberance of youth; in sophomore year, we entered into emotional and philosophic angst; we have worked hard and suffered the final agonies of senior year—theses, that is—and we have now come to what we hope is sweet repose. We have little direct experience of what lies beyond this academic death; all that we know comes from those graduates who (rumors say) return to campus some nights and wander about as if trying to complete some unfinished business.

But even when we think about it more deeply, graduation still seems like death. Death is nothing but the separation of what should never part; in graduation we are separated from a life we have lived and from people we have loved. We have lived a life here fit, as Augustine puts it, “to melt our souls together, and out of many [souls] make but one” (Conf. 4.8.13). Today we are separated from our friends, and in being separated from them we are in some sense separated from ourselves. If we follow this thought to its conclusion, though, life seems to be
nothing more than little death after little death, separation after separation, all until we come to the ultimate and final leave-taking. Life itself seems to be nothing more than a protracted death.

Or at least that is what natural reason tells us; that is the conclusion open to those who are strangers to the Promise, those without hope and without God in the world. But we know that Jesus Christ has conquered death; He has trampled it down with His own death. Through His death unto life, He has given all of our sufferings and deaths new meaning. Death was final before, but He has given it a new finality: He has made death the servant of life. He has made death the temporary separation before life eternal, and in doing so we can even say that He has made death like unto life. He has made all things new.

And it is our part to join Him in this same restoration during our lives on Earth. We must turn our eyes Heavenward and conform the things of earth to those of Heaven. In doing so, we will inevitably encounter opposition, as Fr. Euteneuer reminded us at the Baccalaureate Mass; in doing so, we will inevitably suffer martyrdom of some sort. It is just as Father Zosima says in *Brothers Karamazov*: “I am sorry I can say nothing more consoling to you, for love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all. Men will even give their lives if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over, with all looking on and applauding as though on the stage. But active love is
labor” (*Brothers Karamazov*, Bk. II, ch. 4). But this should not deter us: we are called to love; we are called to labor.

And this call to fraternal charity is not just a temporary means to Heaven, something to be cast aside in the Vision of God; even in Heaven, we will love our neighbor for God’s sake. The life that Christ is drawing us toward is a common life—it is the life of the New Jerusalem. But the splendor of the Heavenly Jerusalem is reflected even in the cities of earth: the eternal and the infinite are so full that they overflow themselves and break into time and into our lives in time. For this reason, every town and community allows the New Jerusalem to shine forth eschatologically. But above all it is our life here at Christendom that has allowed us a glimpse into eternity and into the New Jerusalem, a glimpse that we should take forth and offer to whatever communities we later join.

The Heavenly Jerusalem is our hope in life, in death, and in graduation. Today the members of the Class of 2010 part from Christendom and from one another, and we will likely never again be united here on earth. We graduate today; we die today; but in all of our deaths, we remember Him Who has conquered death and refashioned it for our salvation. Today we all suffer the death of graduation together, but we should all be filled with confident hope that we will one day be reunited in the New Jerusalem.