

Put life's timeless lessons into practice

Dear class of 2013,

In the past weeks I have spoken to many of you about the days to come, especially about the day to come: Graduation Day. It's a day to which you look forward with excitement and anticipation, a day which speaks of things past, things to come and things that are timeless.

Interestingly, the past offers us many opportunities. The first is to give thanks. Many personal blessings have flowed into your lives through the years: family, faith, friends, education and lessons of various sorts. We should never take such blessings for granted but always give thanks for them.

We give God thanks first of all, because he is the unseen source of every blessing. But we should also give thanks, individually, to the people who have been God's instruments in our lives — our parents, teachers, coaches, school staff members, friends and all those who have inspired us through the years.

Perhaps because you're young you don't think a word of thanks from you amounts to much, but the opposite is true. When you give people thanks for what they've done for you, it means the world to them.

What they have done, they have done out of love and often at great sacrifice. Don't forget to notice their sacrifice, and don't forget to give thanks!

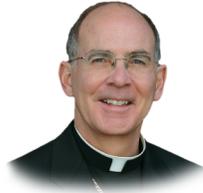
Lessons learned

Another opportunity that arises out of the past is to appreciate the value of lessons learned through struggle and failure. Perhaps it sounds strange to say such a thing.

Struggle and failure are great teachers, because they teach us to rise to the occasion, overcome setbacks, pick ourselves up when we have failed and move forward with hope.

God is always at our side, offering his hand in friendship and support — and when we have sinned — in forgiveness. Just to touch his hand gives us balance when we are wobbly on our feet because of failure or setback. God offers forgiveness, second (and third ...) chances, and hope.

We should give thanks for the past but not be burdened by our past failures



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and sins. Would you ever drive your car forward while looking only into the rear-view mirror?

Now is also the time when you naturally think of things to come.

What will become of me? What should I be in life? How do I recognize the path I should take? How do I make good decisions? Must I have everything

figured out, mapped out, right now? What if I make a mistake and have to change course mid-stream?

These are all good questions, the kind of questions every one of us has asked.

Plan, dream, hope

It is impossible to foretell the future, and we should not try. But to make plans, dream, hope, imagine — these can be very helpful endeavors. Every one of us can be stretched beyond our current capacities, grow in strength and stamina, and accomplish things that seem impossible to us today.

But that stretching, strengthening and accomplishing begin now, as I put one foot in front of another in fidelity to whatever task is before me. Do you have a temporary job, one that does not represent your ultimate goal? The Lord Jesus reminded us that fidelity to small things prepares us for great things.

Yes, make plans and dream about the future — but take steps in that direction today, one by one, by applying yourself to the simplest, most tedious and mundane tasks that your current job gives you. Such steps will prove your mettle, give you confidence and show others what you're made of.

Most of all, when dreaming of the future, pray. Pray a simple prayer: "Lord, what do you want me to do with the rest of my life?" God, who loves us more than we can imagine and knows us much better than we know ourselves, has a plan for us — and in prayer, when the time is right, he will share it with us. Pray!

Timeless truths

Timeless truths are the same for the greatest and least, the powerful and powerless. Will we put God first in our lives? The opportunity to give God first place never leaves us, and though we might have to reorder our lives time and again to make sure we give him first place, we will never regret placing him first.

Will we put others before ourselves, no matter where life takes us? If we think the world will always be "about me," and if we constantly try to order it that way, we will be continually frustrated — and more importantly, we will have stepped on people and ignored them along the way.

On the other hand, when we put others first, we strengthen both them and ourselves. God did not create us to be selfish, and those who live lives of selfishness will never be happy; we were made for selflessness and love!

Another opportunity the future presents us is to put into practice the timeless lessons we learn through the years. The moral compass given us by Christ and the Church keeps us on the straight and narrow (and leads us back to the straight and narrow when we have strayed).

Our moral compass will always be determined by faith in God, truth, honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, love, life, fairness, selflessness, stewardship, courage and fidelity to God, spouse, siblings, friends, coworkers and employees. Every one of us has the opportunity to strengthen others and make our communities stronger by being faithful to timeless truths.

Ironically, even if those around us don't agree with the timeless truths we know to be of greatest value, they are nonetheless strengthened if we remain faithful! We let them down if we are not faithful.

Thank you for reading these simple words. They are not much, but I think they are solid enough to be the foundation of every life, the foundation of peace of mind for you today and always.

St. Augustine once wrote a wonderful variation on the thoughts I have offered, and I end this letter with his words and my promise of prayer. "Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to his love, and the future to his providence."

Sincerely in Christ,
Archbishop Peter Sartain