

Harrison Butker Speech

(view video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JS7RIKSaCc>)

Ladies and gentlemen of the Class of 2024: I would like to start off by congratulating all of you for successfully making it to this achievement today. I'm sure your high school graduation was not what you had imagined, and most likely, neither was your first couple years of college.

By making it to this moment through all the adversity thrown your way from COVID, I hope you learned the important lessons that suffering in this life is only temporary. As a group, you witnessed firsthand how bad leaders who don't stay in their lane can have a negative impact on society. It is through this lens that I want to take stock of how we got to where we are, and where we want to go as citizens and, yes, as Catholics. One last thing before I begin, I want to be sure to thank President Minnis and the board for their invitation to speak.

When President Minnis first reached out a couple of months ago, I had originally said No. You see, last year I gave the commencement address at my alma mater, Georgia Tech, and I felt that one graduation speech was more than enough, especially for someone who isn't a professional speaker. But of course, President Minnis used his gift of persuasion. [*Laughter*] It spoke to the many challenges you all faced throughout the COVID fiasco, and how you missed out on so many milestones the rest of us older people have taken for granted. While COVID might have played a large role throughout your formative years, it is not unique. Bad policies and poor leadership have negatively impacted major life issues. Things like abortion, IVF, surrogacy, euthanasia, as well as a growing support for degenerate cultural values in media, all stem from the pervasiveness of disorder.

Our own nation is led by a man who publicly and proudly proclaims his Catholic faith, but at the same time is delusional enough to make the Sign of the Cross during a pro- abortion rally. He has been so vocal in his support for the murder of innocent babies that I'm sure to many people it appears that you can be both Catholic and prochoice.

He is not alone. From the man behind the COVID lockdowns to the people pushing dangerous gender ideologies onto the youth of America, they all have a glaring thing in common. They are Catholic. This is an important reminder that being Catholic alone doesn't cut it.

These are the sorts of things we are told in polite society to not bring up. You know, the difficult and unpleasant things. But if we are going to be men and women for this time in history, we need to stop pretending that the "Church of Nice" is a winning proposition. We must always speak and act in charity, but never mistake charity for cowardice.

It is safe to say that over the past few years, I have gained quite the reputation for speaking my mind. I never envisioned myself, nor wanted, to have this sort of a platform, but God has given it to me, so I have no other choice but to embrace it and preach more hard truths about accepting your lane and staying in it.

As members of the Church founded by Jesus Christ, it is our duty and ultimately privilege to be authentically and unapologetically Catholic. Don't be mistaken, even within the Church, people in polite Catholic circles will try to persuade you to remain silent. There even was an award-winning film called *Silence*, made by a fellow Catholic, wherein one of the main characters, a Jesuit priest, abandoned the Church, and as an apostate when he died is seen grasping a crucifix, quiet and unknown to anyone but God. As a friend of Benedictine College, His Excellency Bishop Robert

Barron, said in his review of the film, it was exactly what the cultural elite want to see in Christianity -- private, hidden away, and harmless.

Our Catholic faith has always been countercultural. Our Lord, along with countless followers, were all put to death for their adherence to her teachings. The world around us says that we should keep our beliefs to ourselves whenever they go against the tyranny of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We fear speaking truth, because now, unfortunately, truth is in the minority. Congress just passed a bill where stating something as basic as the biblical teaching of who killed Jesus could land you in jail.

But make no mistake, before we even attempt to fix any of the issues plaguing society, we must first get our own house in order, and it starts with our leaders. The bishops and priests appointed by God as our spiritual fathers must be rightly ordered. There is not enough time today for me to list all the stories of priests and bishops misleading their flocks, but none of us can blame ignorance anymore and just blindly proclaim that "That's what Father said." Because sadly, many priests we are looking to for leadership are the same ones who prioritize their hobbies or even photos with their dogs and matching outfits for the parish directory.

It's easy for us laymen and women to think that in order for us to be holy, that we must be active in our parish and try to fix it. Yes, we absolutely should be involved in supporting our parishes, but we cannot be the source for our parish priests to lean on to help with their problems. Just as we look at the relationship between a father and his son, so too should we look at the relationship between a priest and his people. It would not be appropriate for me to always be looking to my son for help when it is my job as his father to lead him.

St. Josemaría Escrivá states that priests are ordained to serve, and should not yield to temptation to imitate laypeople, but to be priests through and through. Tragically, so

many priests revolve much of their happiness from the adulation they receive from their parishioners, and in searching for this, they let their guard down and become overly familiar. This undue familiarity will prove to be problematic every time, because as my teammate's girlfriend says, familiarity breeds contempt. [*Laughter*]

Saint Josemaría continues that some want to see the priest as just another man. That is not so. They want to find in the priest those virtues proper to every Christian, and indeed every honorable man: understanding, justice, a life of work — priestly work, in this instance — and good manners. It is not prudent as the laity for us to consume ourselves in becoming amateur theologians so that we can decipher this or that theological teaching — unless, of course, you are a theology major. We must be intentional with our focus on our state in life and our own vocation. And for most of us, that's as married men and women. Still, we have so many great resources at our fingertips that it doesn't take long to find traditional and timeless teachings that haven't been ambiguously reworded for our times. Plus, there are still many good and holy priests, and it's up to us to seek them out.

The chaos of the world is unfortunately reflected in the chaos in our parishes, and sadly, in our cathedrals too. As we saw during the pandemic, too many bishops were not leaders at all. They were motivated by fear, fear of being sued, fear of being removed, fear of being disliked. They showed by their actions, intentional or unintentional, that the sacraments don't actually matter. Because of this, countless people died alone, without access to the sacraments, and it's a tragedy we must never forget. As Catholics, we can look to so many examples of heroic shepherds who gave their lives for their people, and ultimately, the Church. We cannot buy into the lie that the things we experienced during COVID were appropriate. Over the centuries, there have been great wars, great famines, and yes, even great diseases, all that came with a

level of lethality and danger. But in each of those examples, Church leaders leaned into their vocations and ensured that their people received the sacraments.

Great saints like St. Damien of Molokai, who knew the dangers of his ministry, stayed for 11 years as a spiritual leader to the leper colonies of Hawaii. His heroism is looked at today as something set apart and unique, when ideally it should not be unique at all. For as a father loves his child, so a shepherd should love his spiritual children, too.

That goes even more so for our bishops, these men who are present-day apostles. Our bishops once had adoring crowds of people kissing their rings and taking in their every word, but now relegate themselves to a position of inconsequential existence. Now, when a bishop of a diocese or the bishop's conference as a whole puts out an important document on this matter or that, nobody even takes a moment to read it, let alone follow it.

No. Today, our shepherds are far more concerned with keeping the doors open to the chancery than they are with saying the difficult stuff out loud. It seems that the only time you hear from your bishops is when it's time for the annual appeal, whereas we need our bishops to be vocal about the teachings of the Church, setting aside their own personal comfort and embracing their cross. Our bishops are not politicians but shepherds, so instead of fitting in the world by going along to get along, they too need to stay in their lane and lead.

I say all of this not from a place of anger, as we get the leaders we deserve. But this does make me reflect on staying in my lane and focusing on my own vocation and how I can be a better father and husband and live in the world but not be of it. Focusing on my vocation while praying and fasting for these men will do more for the Church than me complaining about her leaders.

Because there seems to be so much confusion coming from our leaders, there needs to be concrete examples for people to look to in places like Benedictine, a little Kansas college built high on a bluff above the Missouri River, are showing the world how an ordered, Christ-centered existence is the recipe for success. You need to look no further than the examples all around this campus, where over the past 20 years, enrollment has doubled, construction and revitalization are a constant part of life, and people, the students, the faculty and staff, are thriving. This didn't happen by chance. In a deliberate movement to embrace traditional Catholic values, Benedictine has gone from just another liberal arts school with nothing to set it apart to a thriving beacon of light and a reminder to us all that when you embrace tradition, success — worldly and spiritual — will follow.

I am certain the reporters at the AP could not have imagined that their attempt to rebuke and embarrass places and people like those here at Benedictine wouldn't be met with anger, but instead met with excitement and pride. Not the deadly sin sort of pride that has an entire month dedicated to it, but the true God-centered pride that is cooperating with the Holy Ghost to glorify him. Reading that article now shared all over the world, we see that in the complete surrender of self and a turning towards Christ, you will find happiness. Right here in a little town in Kansas, we find many inspiring laypeople using their talents.

President Minnis, Dr. [Andrew] Swafford, and Dr. [Jared] Zimmerer are a few great examples right here on this very campus that will keep the light of Christ burning bright for generations to come. Being locked in with your vocation and staying in your lane is going to be the surest way for you to find true happiness and peace in this life.

It is essential that we focus on our own state in life, whether that be as a layperson, a priest, or religious. Ladies and gentlemen of the class of 2024, you are sitting at the edge of the rest of your lives. Each of you has the potential to leave a legacy that transcends yourselves and this era of human existence. In the small ways, by living out your vocation, you will ensure that God's Church continues and the world is enlightened by your example.

For the ladies present today, congratulations on an amazing accomplishment. You should be proud of all that you have achieved to this point in your young lives. I want to speak directly to you briefly because I think it is you, the women, who have had the most diabolical lies told to you. How many of you are sitting here now about to cross this stage and are thinking about all the promotions and titles you are going to get in your career? Some of you may go on to lead successful careers in the world, but I would venture to guess that the majority of you are most excited about your marriage and the children you will bring into this world.

I can tell you that my beautiful wife, Isabelle, would be the first to say that her life truly started when she began living her vocation as a wife and as a mother. I'm on the stage today and able to be the man I am because I have a wife who leans into her vocation. I'm beyond blessed with the many talents God has given me, but it cannot be overstated that all of my success is made possible because a girl I met in band class back in middle school would convert to the faith, become my wife, and embrace one of the most important titles of all: homemaker.

[Applause lasting 18 seconds]

She is a primary educator to our children. She is the one who ensures I never let football or my business become a distraction from that of a husband and father. She is

the person that knows me best at my core, and it is through our marriage that, Lord willing, we will both attain salvation.

I say all of this to you because I have seen it firsthand how much happier someone can be when they disregard the outside noise and move closer and closer to God's will in their life. Isabelle's dream of having a career might not have come true, but if you asked her today if she has any regrets on her decision, she would laugh out loud, without hesitation, and say, "Heck, No."

As a man who gets a lot of praise and has been given a platform to speak to audiences like this one today, I pray that I always use my voice for God and not for myself. Everything I am saying to you is not from a place of wisdom, but rather a place of experience. I am hopeful that these words will be seen as those from a man, not much older than you, who feels it is imperative that this class, this generation, and this time in our society must stop pretending that the things we see around us are normal.

Heterodox ideas abound even within Catholic circles. But let's be honest, there is nothing good about playing God with having children — whether that be your ideal number or the perfect time to conceive. No matter how you spin it, there is nothing natural about Catholic birth control.

It is only in the past few years that I have grown encouraged to speak more boldly and directly because, as I mentioned earlier, I have leaned into my vocation as a husband and father, and as a man.

To the gentlemen here today: Part of what plagues our society is this lie that has been told to you that men are not necessary in the home or in our communities. As men, we set the tone of the culture, and when that is absent, disorder, dysfunction, and chaos set in. This absence of men in the home is what plays a large role in the violence we

see all around the nation. Other countries do not have nearly the same absentee father rates as we find here in the U.S., and a correlation could be made in their drastically lower violence rates, as well.

Be unapologetic in your masculinity, fighting against the cultural emasculation of men. Do hard things. Never settle for what is easy. You might have a talent that you don't necessarily enjoy, but if it glorifies God, maybe you should lean into that over something that you might think suits you better. I speak from experience as an introvert who now finds myself as an amateur public speaker and an entrepreneur, something I never thought I'd be when I received my industrial engineering degree.

The road ahead is bright. Things are changing. Society is shifting. And people, young and old, are embracing tradition. Not only has it been my vocation that has helped me and those closest to me, but not surprising to many of you, should be my outspoken embrace of the traditional Latin Mass. I've been very vocal in my love and devotion to the TLM and its necessity for our lives. But what I think gets misunderstood is that people who attend the TLM do so out of pride or preference. I can speak to my own experience, but for most people I have come across within these communities this simply is not true. I do not attend the TLM because I think I am better than others, or for the smells and bells, or even for the love of Latin. I attend the TLM because I believe, just as the God of the Old Testament was pretty particular in how he wanted to be worshipped, the same holds true for us today. It is through the TLM that I

encountered order, and began to pursue it in my own life. Aside from the TLM itself, too many of our sacred traditions have been relegated to things of the past, when in my parish, things such as ember days, days when we fast and pray for vocations and for our priests, are still adhered to. The TLM is so essential that I would challenge each of you to pick a place to move where it is readily available.

A lot of people have complaints about the parish or the community, but we should not sacrifice the Mass for community. I prioritize the TLM even if the parish isn't beautiful, the priest isn't great, or the community isn't amazing. I still go to the TLM because I believe the holy sacrifice of the Mass is more important than anything else. I say this knowing full well that when each of you rekindle your knowledge and adherence to many of the church's greatest traditions, you will see how much more colorful and alive your life can and should be.

As you move on from this place and enter into the world, know that you will face many challenges. Sadly, I'm sure many of you know of the countless stories of good and active members of this community who, after graduation and moving away from the Benedictine bubble, have ended up moving in with their boyfriend or girlfriend prior to marriage. Some even leave the Church and abandon God. It is always heartbreaking to hear these stories, and there is a desire to know what happened and what went wrong.

What you must remember is that life is about doing the small things well, setting yourself up for success, and surrounding yourself with people who continually push you to be the best version of you. I say this all the time, that iron sharpens iron. It's a great reminder that those closest to us should be making us better. If you are dating someone who doesn't even share your faith, how do you expect that person to help you become a saint? If your friend group is filled with people who only think about what you're doing next weekend and are not willing to have those difficult conversations, how can they help sharpen you?

As you prepare to enter into the workforce, it is extremely important that you actually think about the places you are moving to. Who is the bishop? What kind of parishes are there? Do they offer the TLM and have priests who embrace their priestly

vocation? Cost of living must not be the only arbiter of your choices, for a life without God is not a life at all, and the cost of salvation is worth more than any career.

I'm excited for the future, and I pray that something I have said will resonate as you move on to the next chapter of your life.

Never be afraid to profess the one holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church, for this is the Church that Jesus Christ established, through which we receive sanctifying grace.

I know that my message today had a little less fluff than is expected for these speeches, but I believe that this audience and this venue is the best place to speak openly and honestly about who we are and where we all want to go, which is Heaven.

I thank God for Benedictine College and for the example it provides the world. I thank God for men like President Minnis, who are doing their part for the Kingdom. Come to find out you can have an authentically Catholic college *and* a thriving football program. [*Laughter and applause*]

Make no mistake: You are entering into mission territory in a post-God world, but you were made for this. And with God by your side and a constant striving for virtue within your vocation, you too can be a saint.

Christ is King.

To the Heights.