

2018 Mount Michael Benedictine Graduation Talk.

Dr. David Peters May 12, 2018.

I want to thank all of you for being here today, wishing these young men well, experiencing their graduation with them. It is an important day for them as they complete this step in their education, their development, and are getting ready to take that next step-where ever that may be. I just have a few words this afternoon/evening to say to the class of 2018.

Next year you will be faced with new experiences. Our hope here at Mount Michael is that we have prepared you.

Everything and everyone has a center. We have one physically and we have one philosophically. When you think of a center think of a circle or an object. You have a core, a center, that holds your fundamental beliefs. Your center needs to be strong. When faced with uncertainties, with stresses, with unknowns you need to be able to fall back to your center.

Your center should be what makes you, you. It should contain all that you hold dear-it is all the things that are important to you.

That analogy is good for you as you travel on next year. You will be faced with some difficult decisions. Some will be unique, some driven by peers, some accidental and some on purpose. I know this; when faced with these choices, the stronger your core is, the healthier your decision will be. But not everyone's core is the same. Some of us are grounded in different faiths or beliefs. Others have different family structures and principles. Mount Michael, in preparing you for college, has been here to make you objective, rational, and productive thinkers. But I like to think that we have been so much more. I would like to think, with our Benedictine values and faith, that we, fundamentally, have helped to make your center stronger.

Another analogy is to trees. Think of it this way. The trunk is the center of the tree. The branches of the tree are all the different things that make the tree unique-just like the things that make you unique. You may have many siblings, you may have none. You may have two parents or one. Your hopes, dreams, attitudes, goals, desires, your faith...all become a part of you. They grow out of your center. But as different as we all are, we all have similar elements. We may

be unique in how we face diversities. Think about the different trees and how they face the elements of nature. Palm trees, found in tropical climates, can withstand hurricane winds; being flexible and movable. Their trunks, their centers, can bend and survive some terrible conditions. Some trees are very tall and strong like the redwoods of northern California. These trees are huge and unique. They also withstand high and strong winds, but they do it out of sheer size and strength, not in the flexibility found in a palm tree. In Richard Preston's seminal work, The Wild Trees he talks about the giant red wood sequoia, some reaching thirty-five stories in height...where, within their branches can be found soil and plants and animals-found nowhere else on this planet. Besides surviving conditions that could be stressful to the tree, they become an environment for new life.

Graduates, you have thoughts, dreams and goals within you that are unique to this planet too. They are your own. You need to follow them, to excel at them, nurture them and live life. They should be close to your center, to the core, to your trunk. While you might have to refine them as you age and mature, you still need to keep them close. If situations or people distract you, then you need to evaluate if they are helping you or if they are hindering you. Are they buffeting, battering and pounding you, just like the terrible winds that a tree may face, so that you lose your way or become uprooted?

You need to decide. But all you need to know, all the true ideals, are those essential to your center. You too, are an environment for new life! And, how you face these elements, these problems, will be unique to you.

You really will find out what is important to you when you are faced with an event that can change your life. Many times, these life changing events are tragic in nature. When those things happen, you will seek out the support of those that mean the most to you. For most of you graduates that would be your parents, or grandparents, that have known you your entire life...or it could be your siblings or close friends. It is people that you trust. And that was the lesson that Christ taught; what keeps us strong, what is at our core, our center, should be love. Many times, when faced with tragedy or these terrible life changing events, we turn to those whom we love. In fact, I would gather that turning to parents, siblings and close friends is the absolute definition of love. While we have them

at the best of times, they are also with us during the worst of times. They are there when the winds are calm or when it is storming. And knowing you can count on them is important to living life. Your center should be grounded in the love that Christ taught us.

Graduates, my hopes and prayers are that you are seated, right now, at this second, with those that support and care about you. That you will take your friendships formed here at Mount Michael, though you will go many roads, with you. That you are there for each other and will always be. I know we all grow and change, but what you have formed over these past four years should be what your center is made of. You should be able to easily reach out to those who care about you, and you for them. You shouldn't even have to think about it. It should come naturally.

I wish you the best of luck as you take this next step in your lives. I am extremely proud of you, please know that you are always welcome back here. Think of all the changes you have seen and experienced in your four years here at Mount Michael. Just think of what the next four years and beyond will bring for you and for us. God bless you always. I want nothing be the best for each and every one of you. Thank you for letting us be part of your lives. We are so proud to be part of yours.

Thank you.