

Graduation Welcome Address

26 May 2017 | Saint Phillip Neri (1515-1595)

M. A. Newcomb

Ladies and gentlemen, Father Manzano, School Board Members, Dr. Daly, faculty and staff, families of the graduates of the Class of 2017, honored guests, and friends of the School: Good morning and welcome to our very first Graduation Ceremony at Saint Theresa Catholic School!

This is the day that so many have anticipated for so long.

It is a day to see the culmination of those plans laid many years ago when Father Stephen Reynolds first conceived of the idea of a classical, Catholic School at Saint Theresa's, and when Mr. Jonathan Beeson laid the academic foundation for this remarkable educational institution. Please join me in thanking those whose vision, whose wisdom, and chiefly, whose toil—and this includes many of our current faculty—have brought us so felicitously to this grand day of celebration!

In the early days, the handful of STCS students didn't even have their own facility. Some nine years later, we occupy one of the most beautiful school buildings in the Archdiocese and have grown to more than 230 pupils studying in 10 grades. This year alone our students have gathered laurels in Art, Track and Field, and Spelling competitions. Thanks to Ms. Dorian Speed, we made a very impressive showing at the Private School Interscholastic Association meets. As a result of the efforts of Mr. Ben George, we are the reigning Chess Champions in the Archdiocese in our first year of competition. Mr. Zachary Turner has placed his talents in the service of our students, leading them to high honors in choir and liturgical chant. Each of our 18 Eighth Grade students was accepted to his or her top pick high school—and this includes institutions of such stature as Saint Thomas, Strake Jesuit, Saint Agnes Academy, Saint John XXIII, and Incarnate Word Academy. Please join me in saluting this very impressive group of young men and women, and in thanking them for setting the bar high for all of those who will come after them.

Father Manzano, Mrs. Rice, and I are also deeply grateful for their parents, who have sacrificed thousands of hours of volunteer care—not to mention thousands of dollars—to make STCS the ringing success that it has become. The staff have likewise given of themselves day and night in support of our students and families. This year, we have set record highs for new applicants and fundraising. Clearly, our labors have been abundantly crowned with grace by the Lord Jesus, as we have sought to make alive here an institution that reflects His glory.

I also want to note on this Memorial of Saint Philip Neri that the founder of the Oratorians did not get to Rome to study and pray until he was 18—through the talents

and efforts of Dr. Cassella, our students will get to do these very things in Rome just three days from now, and most of them are only 14! I'm convinced this is true because our faculty are that much better than the Florentine Dominicans that trained young Philip in the early 16th Century!!

For all of our joy in the many fine achievements of our graduating students, however, in another sense this is a day that so many had hoped would never come. The leave-taking that results from reaching a milestone of maturity is always a heavily mixed blessing. I learned from our graduates in senior interviews earlier this year, and from speaking with their parents in recent days, that this is also a time of sadness as many prepare to say farewell to STCS and start a new chapter in their lives. For not every page in the book of life is guaranteed to be filled with the joy, wonder, laughter, camaraderie, support, and love that you have known here. Yet we can only greet the future, with all its challenges and glories, by saying goodbye to the here and now and those who have seen us through past trials. To everyone who feels deeply the bitternessweetness of this landmark day, this portentous hour, I tell you the Lord is with you, our prayers go with you, and you will live in our hearts and minds as having blazed the trail for graduates of this institution for generations to come.

As we hold so many cherished memories in our hearts and look to the blessings of the future, I would like to introduce our very first Graduation Speaker. For me, it is truly fitting that the extraordinary woman who first introduced me to Saint Theresa Catholic School years ago is with us today to encourage our first graduates. Dr. Daly is a model of what a person of energy and devotion can accomplish with a great Liberal Arts education. She has rightly garnered an impressive array of accolades in academia, government, and business. A graduate of Mount Holyoke College, Dr. Daly earned her Ph.D. in English from Johns Hopkins University, is an expert in modern Literature and classical Rhetoric. She was Chief of Communications for the Pfizer Corporation for several years, has been an Academic Vice President, and served as a college President. Above all of this, she is one of the most delightful, devout, and genuinely kind people you will ever meet. Those of us who have been lucky enough to have had her as a mentor and a friend feel acutely that we have been intensely graced with the opportunity to become a better self under her virtuous influence and through her good example. I give you Dr. Anne Carson Daly!