

Thank you, Dr. Newcomb, for your kind introduction and welcome.

Father Manzano, graduates, parents, families, friends, faculty and staff of Saint Theresa Catholic School, thank you for your invitation to be a part of this joyous event.

While we are here to celebrate and applaud your accomplishments, graduates, let us take a moment to thank those who have made this possible.

First, let us thank your parents for their love, support, and patience, and for choosing such a magnificent school for you.

Secondly, let us thank Dr. Newcomb and all your teachers, past and present, for their care and guidance through the years.

Let us also thank and appreciate Father Manzano, for providing spiritual shepherding to the entire St. Theresa's community.

And I want to thank you for the Texas-style and Texas-sized welcome I have received! My college roommate was a Texan and – before we even met – our dorm room was festooned with the Lone Star flag and a banner warning me “Don't mess with Texas!”.

Well, I took that advice and have come to admire the freedom-loving, generous, and kind folks of Texas. It is good to be among you today!

We often think of graduation as an event that marks the end of something. And that is certainly true; this occasion marks the completion of your time and work and experience at St. Theresa's. Each of you has many memories of the years you spent here – you remember the tests you studied for, the projects completed, the games won.

You also remember the difficulties, the goals not quite met, the arguments with friends.

And I am sure that you each have memories of the laughter you have shared with one another, the times that were just plain fun and silly. Together as a class, you have woven a tapestry of memories that belongs exclusively to you, the Class of 2018.

And so I am honored that you have asked me to be a part of this memorable occasion in this most beautiful church.

While your graduation from St. Theresa's does indeed signify the end of the first stage of your formation – it also marks the beginning of something.

It is the beginning of the next phase of your journey in life.

Successful journeys require solid planning. So today I invite you to think about your own path forward and what you will need to ensure that you successfully reach the end.

The first requirement, of course, is you must know your destination. Where do you wish to arrive? An even more important question – where should you arrive?

Our destination determines the roads we take, so it is very important that we fix our sights properly on this.

Your parents have chosen a Catholic classical education for you precisely because they want to set you firmly on the path that will lead you to your destination. Armed with wisdom and virtue, trained to love all that is true, good, and beautiful, they have placed you in the best possible position to move forward.

And it's important to remember that you are not brand new to the journey. Can you remember finding your way in your new school? Some of you may have been little, some older, but all of you can remember keeping your eyes peeled for your name on a name plate, directing you to where your seat was.

Secondly, a fruitful journey requires sound navigation. The ancients navigated according to the stars and even today – when sophisticated equipment inevitably fails – a good navigator can still rely upon the heavens to illumine the way.

You are citizens of the Lone Star state – that’s true – but before that you are the sons and daughters of Him whom we call the “Morning Star” – our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Currently, the north star – an important marker for navigators – is Polaris. But that hasn’t always been the case. Go back a millennium or two and you will find a different star occupying that space in the heavens.

This is why – as sons and daughters of the King –we look to Him as our true star, the source and summit of our faith, whose kingdom will have no end.

And yet, even with the most sublime navigation in place, we sometimes lose our way.

Fairy tales are full of examples of characters who got lost on their way – Hansel and Gretel, swayed off course by promise of sweets – and Goldilocks – whose curiosity overtook her prudence and landed her in the comfy bed of a family of, well, frightening predators.

Now, I doubt that any of you would fall for a house covered in candy or a an inviting cottage in the woods with an open door (And should you come across either of these, a word of advice – don’t do it!). But there will be other distractions along the way.

Things like – wanting to fit in with new friends, getting a little confused by the bright artificial lights of stages and stadiums, even forgetting who we are.

Should you find yourself off track, the way back is simple and laid out for us by the Church. Separate yourself from the crowd, raise your eyes to the

heavens in prayer, experience the healing and strengthening power of the sacraments, and get back on the road.

Finally, it's important to remember that in your time of journeying, you don't journey alone. Over the next few years, you will meet many people, some of whom will become dear to you, and others that will simply cross your path for a time.

And in that journey, and among those travelers, you will be called to reflect the light of the Morning Star, so as to help others on their way. Your Father in heaven has ordained this.

The prophet Jeremiah tells us:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
Before you were born, I dedicated you,  
A prophet to the nations I appointed you”.

If this sounds a little scary to you today, take comfort in knowing that Jeremiah was a little freaked out by it, too. He answered:

“Ah Lord God!”  
“I do not know how to speak. I am too young!”

But the Lord reassured him:

“Do not say ‘I am too young’.  
To whomever I send you, you shall go;  
Whatever I command you, you shall speak.  
Do not be afraid of them,  
For I am with you to deliver you”.

And so we have the promise that the Lord will give us whatever we need for this journey. We have only to look to him – to stay close to him in prayer, Scripture, and Sacrament – and we can rest even as we journey through tough days.

This knowledge is the source of courage. The great Apollo 11 astronaut – Neil Armstrong, – whose historic and momentous walk on the moon was managed not far from here at what we now call the Johnson Spaceflight Center – puts it simply:

“There can be no great accomplishment without risk”.

Sometimes you have to take a chance and step out – apply for that honors program, try out for the team or the school musical – in order to achieve. But don’t be discouraged if you fail – it’s your failures that strengthen and toughen you and provide the best opportunities to learn the lessons you’ll need.

And so your journey continues forward.

This brings me back to my original question: What should your destination be?

Before we consider your ultimate destination, we know that the path is marked by many smaller goals – for you, the next stop is high school. Perhaps college after that. Maybe military service, or work in a particular industry.

You may be called to serve the Church as a priest or a member of a religious order. You may be asked to form a family and nurture the faith of the children God wants to bring into the world.

This is your vocation – or calling – and if you travel well and navigate according to the Morning Star – you will discover it and it will bring you the greatest happiness.

But even this is not your final destination, although it is the path that leads you there.

Ultimately, our destination – our destiny – is union with God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – expressed by serving him and others in this life, and enjoying the fullness of joy with him in the next.

This, incidentally, is the mission of St. Theresa's School.

And as our graduates are about to pass from being students to alumni of St. Theresa, a word to those at your school that continue to serve this mission:

St. Augustine tells us that our Lord is "beauty ever ancient, ever new". This is a good description of the Catholic liberal education that you provide to the students providentially entrusted to you.

While its roots are centuries deep, growing from the very heart of the Church, we who distill this beautiful tradition are called to be "ever new". Classical educators, too, are on a journey - one of continuous self-reflection, of intellectual and spiritual growth, - the fruit of which is the beautiful mission of St. Theresa's Catholic School, a community rejoicing in the truth.

Thank you, and congratulations to the Class of 2018!