

“Take with you words and return to the Lord”

At last! The last day of your last year in high school! The last hours of the last day, and yes, I know, your last, last chapel service! Well, here you are, the pride of parents and grandparents, the pride of teachers and friends, the pride of the school, standing on the threshold of your graduation. Today you step up and you step out - in a few hours you will no longer be students of King’s-Edgehill, you will be graduates and alumni. You are leaving the school, to be sure, but only to enter into a new relation to this place which has been your place of abiding.

You step up and you step out onto a new stage of life and into a world of adult duties and responsibilities. You are leaving to embark upon new endeavours and the question is not so much about what you are leaving behind but about what you will take with you. You will take with you, I hope, something of what has taken shape in you during your time of abiding here at King’s-Edgehill. And what you take with you will be, in turn, what you give to others wherever you go.

For education really speaks to the matter of character. King’s-Edgehill has been the *alma mater* - the nursing mother - of your formative years, intellectually, spiritually, morally, and athletically. This place of abiding has been the place of your maturing, the place of your growing up to become more fully and more truly yourselves. Ideals and principles have been set before you but you have had to make them your own, to let them have their play and their resonance in you. Something of your own identity is bound up in the educational project of this school.

“I am the vine; ye are the branches...abide in my love”, Jesus says in the lesson which Jill Payne read for us this morning. *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.”* It is the last and, perhaps one of the most profound of the so-called *“I am”* sayings of Jesus. Through this gardening and agricultural image, we are recalled to who we are and in whom we have our being. But the images are not static; they are dynamic. *“Abide in my love”* is not about a retreat into a fortress of security, huddled together in fear against an alien and hostile world. No. It is the love which sets in motion, which frees and ennobles. We participate in nothing less than the love of God, the self-giving, self-sacrificing, all sufficient love that is the Trinity, the love of the Father for the Son in the bond of the Holy Spirit. It is the love which gives meaning and purpose to all our loves without which they are nothing worth. Our humanity finds its truth and dignity in the communion of the Trinity.

Nor is it about an unknowing and unknowable love, all sentiment and no mind. No. Jesus’ twofold identity - his identity with us and his identity with God - is

the basis of our formative identity through his word abiding in us. We have only to will it to make it our own. Our freedom lies precisely in honouring our derivations in their objective integrity.

Words. On this last day of last words, perhaps you have had enough of words - the Rev's words (what did he say?), the Headmaster's words - latinate, polysyllabic exfoliations for use in everyday conversation, teachers' words, coaches' words, Mr. Marino's words. Too many words, you may say. How can we remember all that? And yet they have had their resonance in you and belong to what you have become. Judging from the men last night at the prom, clearly "*the good guys dress in black*" - you remembered that!

In honour of Mr. Marino's leaving along with your leaving, let me suggest one last word which captures, I think, something of your character as a class. The word, appropriately enough is an Italian word - I'll call it a Roger Marino word though I don't know if it is much used in the Gaspé or for that matter by Roger. It is *sprezzatura*. It signifies the art of effortless mastery, the ease and grace of doing difficult things, the things that because they are worth doing are worth doing right. We have seen a lot of *sprezzatura* from all of you collectively and individually - on the rugby field, the basketball court, the hockey arena, the theatre stage, on cadet parade, in the classroom, in church and chapel.

We have laughed and cried together, we have sung and danced together, we have struggled and triumphed, lost and won together, we have wrestled together with the images of Scripture to engage the questions of our own day respectfully and thoughtfully; in short, we have prayed and sung God's praises together. And all those things, I think, are more than memories; they have become part of who you are. They are about what you take with you and what abides in you. It is all signaled most wonderfully in the lesson which Devon Walding read for us this morning, "*Take with you words and return to the Lord.*"

Hosea is the great love-prophet of the Old Testament who recalls us to the all-forgiving love of God, a love which is greater than our sins and follies, a love which restores and perfects, the love in which we may "*flourish as a garden*" and "*blossom as a vine*", but only if we take with us words and return to the Lord in whom we have our abiding, even in your leaving, for the words go with you, making their resonance in you. And all with a certain *sprezzatura*, a certain effortless ease and grace which belongs to your freedom and dignity, a freedom and dignity that is God-given and grace-bestowed. For the words which you will take with you, I hope, are the words of understanding which provide a way of thinking about our humanity and our world.

We have met here morning after morning in the quiet contemplativeness of this holy place "*where prayer has been made valid*" (T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*) Here we

have been reminded of what is greater than ourselves. Such is the mystery of God without which we are less than ourselves. Here *"in that utter visibility/ the stone's alive with what's invisible"* (Seamus Heaney, *Seeing Things*). Such are the things of God. We ignore them at our peril.

You go forth from this school today. What kind of world do you face? A world of fearful uncertainties and trembling anxieties? A world of despair and pain, a world of terrorism and war? No doubt. But how will you face it? Not by retreating into yourselves in the illusions of security and convenience, I hope, but in the freedom and grace which belongs to what you have taken from your time here. From what you have taken you have much to give in return. Let those words have their resonance in you to the glory of God and the betterment of the world.

And that they may have their resonance in you, let us quietly and prayerfully listen to wonderful intensity of the repeated codas of Pachelbel's Canon, played to the glory of God by Mr. Stephen Allen, Mr. Xin Ma and our chapel organist, Mr. Stephen Murray, all of them, it seems, playing here for the last time, but all of them playing with that certain *sprezzatura* which has belonged to our time together.

We shall miss all of you for you have all become quite dear to us. I wish you Godspeed and every blessing. Go with God.

"Take with you words and return to the Lord"

*Rev'd David Curry
Chaplain
King's-Edgehill School
Encaenia, June 15, 2002*