

Joan Goodfellow Knetemann
Coriden Valedictory Address

Washington Theological Union Graduation
Friday, May 7, 2010
Notre Dame Chapel
Trinity Washington University

Thank you, Dr. Brown.

Father Coriden, Fr. Burkhard,
Father Tillotson, Fr. O'Connor
Dr. Anderson,
Fr. Donio and the Board of Trustees
Faculty, Staff, Family, Friends, Students
and the very grateful class of 2010,

It is amazing what a lot of chocolate will do.

For those of you who haven't been around the Union for the last four years I have fed WTU students more M & M's, English Toffee, and Chocolate Torte than any of us care to admit.

Some have called me the Class Mom.

Those enticements aside,
I was asked to speak to you not only as a Washington Theological Union graduate, but as a Catholic Woman, and a Catholic mother.

These are not always easy things to be. As students we have written countless pages, and discarded countless more, (in fact, I have bound the discarded pages of my thesis and am using them as scrap paper.)

We have read countless texts: Sacred Scripture, Vatican documents, Primary Sources, Secondary Sources, Internet Sources...

Listened to our esteemed professors, argued with our classmates, and posted rebuttals on blackboard.

We have gotten up early, stayed up late, been formed, castigated, converted, and now affirmed as credible witnesses to Catholic theology.

Apart from our studies all of us have attempted to be credible witnesses of our faith to our families and our communities. We thank them all for their many sacrifices.

As a mother I have heard my children struggle and ask (usually around midnight) "Why doesn't God want me to be happy?" Or, from a 15 year old: "Mom, there is no God."

We mothers know Pastoral Care. And we know what it is to be adored, ignored, admired, dishonored, and loved. All at the same time.

I know what it is like to be Catholic today because I am a mother.

And particularly because I am a mother, I am thrilled to speak for the class of 2010. And as a student, right now I wish I had taken Jim Wallace's homiletics class. But, since I have listened well, both to you, and to a certain Georgetown Jesuit, I will offer THREE IMPORTANT POINTS from and for the class of 2010.

First Point: Remember who you are, where you come from, and where your heart is.

When we leave the Union, we enter a world that is surrounded by doubt and cynicism about our church's credibility. As the church struggles amid the sinfulness of abuse and neglect of responsibility, we are called to remind ourselves who we are as Catholics, and who we represent.

I have often equated the Catholic Church to a big and very.....colorful....family. And while some family members relish in the glorious vestments of the Trinitine Mass, we must all remember that we are a church committed to solidarity with the impoverished, the infirm and the invisible. We are the church of Catholic Relief Services and Center for Concern, L'Arche and Providence Hospital, the Ignatian Volunteer Corps, and the Franciscan Action Network.

Who are we? We are the church of courageous vowed religious women. We are the Church who toils in the remotest parts of the world tending to the AIDS epidemic. We are the Church of innumerable soup kitchens. We are the church of Carmelite hospitality and Paulist Publications. We are the church of countless priests who understand the need for compassionate pastoral care. We are the Church whose liturgy speaks to the people, involves the people, and nourishes the people.

Class of 2010, as we 'Go to the World', remember, as Dr. Koernke so poignantly told us in Eucharist class: Remember who you are, and where your heart is.

Second Point: Remember: God's Time, not my time.

Julianne Wallace just received the Vincent Cushing Award for Service. Last year at this time, Julianne and I were sitting with the musicians and nursing the wounds of failure as our goal to graduate with last year's 40th Anniversary class eluded us.

Last year, some called it a social justice issue.

Some called it a failure of the Union.

Julianne and I both call it a gift.

The gift was Kairos: the ancient Greek word meaning the right or opportune moment. Not the importance of Chronological Time, but the significance of the undetermined period of time in which God's grace can most fully come to maturation.

WTU has taught all of us – in strikingly poignant ways – that our timing is not necessarily God's timing.

What we have learned is that obstacle and struggle are often a time for Kairos – letting God's grace work in God's time.
Class of 2010 when you are defeated persist, and look for the gift and transformation of Kairos.

Third and final Point: Resurrection

Mothers have a real sense of the resurrection – of the transformation that comes with giving new life.

The resurrection is the result of struggle and the insistence on hope. We have seen the Washington Theological Union struggle through administrative instability, financial difficulty and doubt. Today we see the springtime of resurrection, the capable leadership of a new president, the budding of new programs, and the incredible work of our new Academic dean.

Our class of 2010 is a class of resurrection. We are a class who are witnesses to God's transformation, both personal and institutional. And we are a class called to transform the world, and to bring to the world the glorious joy which is born of struggle and trial....a class who will always be reminded of who we are, where our heart is, and that all good things come...

In God's time.

Thank you very much.