

## *An Open Letter to our High School Seniors,*

As I have been walking and driving around the parish I have seen a good number of signs and banners congratulating you on your graduation. My first response to seeing your name is to think about how I have seen you grow over these past four years, particularly through our youth ministry program. I have seen your best version of self shine through your service and participation in the life of the parish. I am grateful to you, our young church, for keeping our community vibrant with your spirit and your youthful enthusiasm.

Along with this feeling of pride in each and every one of you also comes the feeling of care and concern as you navigate through these challenging times and deal with the disappointment of a senior year that has been disrupted and a commencement that will certainly be way different than you could have ever imagined! I have heard from many of your parents of how you have graciously arisen to the challenge of these days, and are actually doing better than they in dealing what is unfolding!

When I think back to my senior year in high school – which was a very long time ago – I remember some of my own challenges that in a small way help me to relate to what you may be experiencing.

I began my high school years at Mount Saint Joseph High School in Baltimore, Maryland. Over the course of my freshman, sophomore and junior years I made a solid place for myself in the school community and was enjoying a great circle of friends that I spent a lot of time with. I was doing well academically, dating a young lady with whom I went to the junior prom and was in line to get the leads the coming year school productions – I found I was much better suited for the stage than the playing field.

Then, at the end of my junior year, my dad announced to us that he was being transferred to New Jersey and we would have to move. We tried to come up with a plan to somehow let me stay in Maryland and live with some friends for my senior year. But in the end my mom said that we all needed to make this move together so off we went. I was so disappointed and actually pretty angry for a while. I enrolled in Wayne Valley High School for my senior year, changing from an all-boys Catholic School to the town public school. It was not easy starting a new school in senior year, but thanks to some kind fellow students I made the adjustment and made it through OK to graduation, without a prom date but at least with having gotten a decent role in the school play.

I have come to realize that God was at work in this big change of plans in my life. Not only did I come to a deeper sense of my vocation but I also came to see that God uses all of our life experiences to help us to get to a greater awareness of his purpose in our lives and his plan for our happiness. In the Old Testament Book of the Prophet Jeremiah we read: “For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

My dear young friends, God’s plan for you will not be thwarted by this virus. His love for you is greater than any force upon the earth and in the heavens. That unconditional, unyielding and unbelievable love will see you through as long as you step into its flow and let it carry you. I pray for each of you every day that you know how special you are to God and to us His Church – and to me your pastor.

May you, your families and your future be blessed with all that will keep you strong in faith, firm in hope and big in love.

*Congratulations Class of 2020!*

In Christ’s Love,

*Fr. George*