

Dear Graduates,

Congratulations on your graduation! This is a beautiful and deeply gratifying moment in your lives and in the lives of your loved ones as, indeed, it should be. It is the end of a chapter and the beginning of another in the amazing story of your lives. I want you to know that your families and this community of faith love you and are so very proud of you.

As you come to this significant moment in your lives, do not forget to take the time to thank your parents and loved ones. They have stood by you and surrounded you with their love, support and encouragement. They have also made sacrifices for you in so many ways so that you can experience the joy of your graduation. Please do not take their love for granted.

As you move on to the next phase of your lives, I would like to share a few words with you, to help you along your journey. Speaking of journeys, a verse from one of my favorite hymns called *the Servant Song* has these memorable lines: “We are pilgrims on a journey/We are travelers on the road/We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.” Isn’t that why we belong to a community of faith?

Do not forget to use your gifts and talents to serve God and others. Service to God and others are the keys to joyful and meaningful lives. A German theologian, Albert Schweitzer, addressing his students as they are about to graduate, has this to say: “I do not know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve.” Put simply, the most joyful people in the world are those who have sought and found ways to serve. Self-centered and stingy people are among the most miserable. Moreover, when we give of our time, talent and treasure, we receive infinitely more. “It is in giving that we receive,” St. Francis of Assisi wrote in his inspirational prayer, “Lord make me an instrument of your peace.”

Remember that from the person to whom much is given, much is expected. When I was a youngster, my mother never tired of saying those words to me and my siblings. You have been given so many wonderful opportunities in this beautiful country you have been fortunate to be born in, to become absolutely anything to which you set your mind. Do not forget how privileged you are! Please use the many advantages and opportunities that life in this country offers you to make the world a better place.

Take the time to appreciate the little things in life. This almost sounds like a cliché but it is important. God is often to be found in the seemingly insignificant and ordinary details in life, the small things. “*The God of Small Things*,” is incidentally the title of an award-winning novel by the acclaimed Indian novelist, Arundhati Roy. I recommend it.

Take the time to grow in your faith and to cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ. Why is this important? It is because you will need the inner light, guidance and strength that only God can give, for the times in your life when challenges and difficulties arise. You will need

your faith as an anchor of stability when storms and tempest come, as they surely will, at some point in your life. This is one of the few guarantees in life.

Having a relationship with God sustains you and keeps you grounded. You will feel lost without it. How do you build this relationship? Through prayer, study and doing the works of mercy. There is no better way to grow in prayer than by making the effort to come to Sunday Mass. You cannot do it on your own. None of us can. Reading about the faith is also a great way to continue to learn and grow in it. It is a great sadness that many Catholics today, who are advanced and sophisticated in many other aspects of their lives, still have a sixth grade level of religious education. Little wonder that they sooner or later cast it aside. As one of my former seminary professors used to say, "Faith won't grow, if you don't want to know." Do not be indifferent to the lives of others. Do something to help those less fortunate than you. Be involved. You will be surprised by how much your faith will grow in the process.

Finally, I will end this letter with a poem by an unknown author, entitled, "Take Time."

*Take time to think;
It is the source of power.
Take time to read;
It is the foundation of wisdom.
Take time to play;
It is the secret of staying young.
Take time to be quiet;
It is the opportunity to seek God.
Take time to be aware;
It is the opportunity to help others.
Take time to love and be loved;
It is God's greatest gift.
Take time to laugh;
It is the music of the soul.
Take time to be friendly;
It is the road to happiness.
Take time to dream;
It is what the future is made of.
Take time to pray;
It is the greatest power on earth.*

May God richly bless you as you conclude this exciting chapter of your life stories and begin another. May it be even more exciting and life-giving. Please know of my love, prayers and best wishes. Once again, Congratulations!

In Christ,

Rev. Fr. Alvan Amadi