

HEADMASTER BURKE'S OPENING REMARKS

Posted 09/10/2012 11:34AM



The following remarks were made by Headmaster Bill Burke during Corporate Chapel on Monday, September 10, 2012.

What consonance there is in the wonderful messages we just heard from Father John and from Mr. Chambers! Father John urges us to lift up our hearts and our souls and hopes and sorrows and our dreams to our gracious and loving God, and Mr. Chambers reminds us that the Lord upholds our lives. Our job then is to cooperate with God, to lift ourselves up to Him who upholds us.

We are so very blessed to have our outstanding Board of Trustees President, Mr. Jim Elcock, and our new trustees with us. Many years ago, when I began my career as a teacher and coach, I didn't really understand the vitally important role that the trustees play in a school. Over time, my responsibilities have changed, and I have been blessed to see up close their function. A board oversees the strategic plan of a school and devotes itself fully to strengthening the institution in every possible way, and our board is truly outstanding.

When an institution has integrity, every person is doing his and her job to near perfection. When I was in college and shortly after, the Red Sox had this terrific left-handed pitcher named Bill Lee. A USC graduate and a very intelligent man, Lee was also a way out there kind of guy, who well earned his nickname: Spaceman. I remember an interview in which Spaceman talked about the thrill he received by playing his role as part of the team. He painted a picture of throwing the ball, with one out and a runner on first, inducing a grounder to the shortstop, Rick Burleson, who threw to Jerry Remy at second, who threw on to Yaz at first to complete an inning ending double play. Poetry in motion! A glorious symphony! Well, that's what we have here with the Board leading the way and the faculty and staff and the parents and grandparents and other family members working in sacred partnership, all focused on same goal: helping each young man become the best he can be in body, mind, and soul, with our alumni and our many friends pitching in to help in any way possible. What a thrill it is for each of us to play our parts!

We know that integrity is all about wholeness and that which is unbroken, and we know that like individuals, teams can have integrity or be broken. What the Patriots and the Red Sox am I talking about?

Last Friday, we discussed the connection Father John made between integrity and Unbroken, the title of our All School Read. Afterward, Mr. Nerbonne pointed to the cross and reminded me that scripture teaches that not a bone was broken. Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, who loves us first is our true and eternal model of integrity.

Now for the prepared remarks:

This is a strange talk to give because I don't think that I'm going to tell you a single thing that you don't already know. Oh, there might be a few images, definitions, and quotations that are new to you, but the essence of this speech about integrity has been known by every one of us for as long as we can remember. So here's this morning's and this year's theme: It's right to be honest and wrong to be dishonest. There. I've said it. I could sit down now and let everyone get an early jump on first period, but I won't.

As I shared last week in our opening faculty meeting, when I think of integrity, I think of its close association with integration, and with integer, and I think of the number one, no gap between appearance and reality; what you see is what you get; one person – the same in word and in deed.

A fully integrated person is the person of unity and integrity whom the imprisoned St. Paul encourages the people of Ephesus – and, I believe, all of us – to be in Ephesians 4, 1-6:

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all.

And I love these powerful dictionary definitions of integrity:

Adherence to moral and ethical principles, soundness of moral character, honesty...the state of being whole, entire, or undiminished... a sound, unimpaired, or perfect condition... rectitude, probity, virtue... a sense of uncorrupted virtue.

In our catalogue and on our website, you will find these phrases that include the words integrated and integrity:

We seek to inspire the integrated, happy, healthy, holy life that God wants us to live.

And

The Honor Code, at the core of our academic program, calls each young man to pledge on his sacred honor that the work he turns in is his own. Hence, students are reminded several times a day that they must be young men of unquestionable integrity who give their best, most honest effort in the classroom and in all areas.

In my annual letter to Arrows beginning their college careers, I include this four word sentence: Hold sacred your integrity.

It is said that there aren't many guarantees in life, but I have one. I guarantee that there isn't a student here who wants to overhear any of these things said about him:

He says one thing and does another.

You can never depend on him.

I don't trust him.

He has no integrity.

How does one gain the trust, respect, admiration, and affection of others? How does one become a man of integrity?

The answer is a four letter word, memorably spoken by Tom Hanks to Matt Damon in the movie: Saving Private Ryan. Hanks, playing the dying Captain Miller, grabs young Private Ryan by his coat, pulls him close, and utters: Earn this!

Of course, Captain Miller was talking about Ryan living a virtuous life to justify all the sacrifices, including Miller's own last full measure of devotion. May each of us hear and respond with conviction to this passionate call: Earn this.

Earn each grade. Win each moment of truth. Turn to the good. Turn away from every temptation to cheat, to lie, to steal. Countless times a day important choices must be made. There is a right and there is a wrong. God has blessed us with the freedom of choice, and every choice we make strengthens or weakens our characters.

Take to heart the message expressed by that great headmaster, Dumbledore:

It's our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.

Choose to be an honest man, and you will be one. Choose to be a man of integrity, and you will be so. Earn this – every graced moment of every graced day.

I remember playing golf with my good friend, Norm Walker of blessed memory. Now Norm was the most competitive person I have ever known. It's the last hole of a very close match, and Norm has lost his ball in the thick rough to the right of the fairway. After stomping around for a bit, he announces that he has found a ball. He reaches down, picks it up, and raises it for inspection. The two other members of the foursome and I stand nearby awaiting the announcement. And I knew, in every fibre of my being, that only the truth would come out, only the truth could come out: "Nope. It's not mine." Had it been his, no inspection by the rest of us would have been called for.

Last spring, when we dedicated the Nerbonne Study, I was privileged to share these words:

Mr. Nerbonne's supreme devotion to Jesus Christ and to his Roman Catholic Church emanate from the core of his being. He loves God, and he loves God's people. My hope...is that you will find yourself working with a person for whom you have total respect and admiration and in whom you have consummate faith, someone like Mr. Nerbonne...If Mr. Nerbonne tell you that something happened, then it happened, and everyone knows it.

What do Mr. Norm Walker and Mr. Nerbonne have in common? They are both motivated to do the right thing from the inside out, not the outside in. It's not a fear of bad consequences that motivates them, but doing right for its own sake that naturally, powerfully flows from their true heart's core.

Several years ago, in his Commencement remarks, then Board of Trustees President, Mr. Jack Birmingham, another paragon of unquestionable integrity, turned our attention to a passage in Anthony Trollope's 19th century novel, *The Duke's Children*. It occurs after one character suggests that he allows the law to be his guide. The Duke explodes in these words:

You should live as not to come near the law – or have the law to come near to you. From all evil against which the law bars you, you should be barred, at an infinite distance, by honor, by conscience, and nobility...between you and me there should be no mention of the law as the guide to conduct.

The law, then, is a floor, not a ceiling. The rules in our Student Guidelines are baselines only. It is our great hope and high expectation that each of you 375 gentlemen will be motivated by forces far greater than fear of getting caught.

Our reading of *UNBROKEN* underscores the importance of faith, hope, love, and integrity.

I share two brief passages from our heroes' time on the raft.

Louie's and Phil's optimism, and Mac's hopelessness, were becoming self-fulfilling.

And

Mac's body grew weaker, following his broken spirit...

Mac was never described as having less ability than Louie or Phil, just less hope.

Integrity is all about truth, and truth is all about inside out simplicity and clarity, as celebrated in Mark Twain's famous piece of advice:

If you tell the truth, you don't need to remember anything.

What an easy way to live! Tell one lie, and we need to come up with another, and oftentimes we forget the first lie.

A few years ago, the then Dunkin Donuts CEO, Jon Luther, when speaking at Bentley College's Commencement, shared these helpful words:

Be honest with employees and customers, even when you make a mistake. You can always recover from the truth.

We're human beings, so we make mistakes all the time. I'm bound to make at least ten mistakes today, but I intend to face each one of them honestly and to strive for atonement.

Many a person over the years has compounded his or her problems by failing to tell the truth right away. We're all sinners, striving to be saints, and, as Oscar Wilde reminds:

Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future.

The more we turn from error to truth, the more consistently we become people of faith and honor and integrity, the brighter our futures become.

Famous investor, Warren Buffett, says that when hiring, he looks for three things: Intelligence, energy, and integrity, and asserts that if the candidate doesn't have the third quality, the first two will kill you.

And who will know if we stray from truth? Who will know if we tell a lie or cheat on a quiz or a test? Who will know if we plagiarize? Two audiences always, I submit, and a third one a lot more often than we can imagine. First, God will know. Second, you will know. Third, others are bound to find out, so we do damage to both our character and our reputation. What we are and what others think of us.

And we're all in this together. I love this dialogue between Sir Thomas More and young Rich in Robert Bolt's great play *A Man For All Seasons*. More is very much the wise mentor to Rich, who is uncertain about what career he should pursue.

More says: Why not be a teacher? You'd be a fine teacher. Perhaps even a great one.

Rich replies: And if I was, who would know it?

More answers: You, your pupils, your friends, God. Not a bad public, that.

We'll hear much more about integrity when we communicate with Mr. Louie Zamperini next week and throughout the year, and we'll draw one another's attention to the truth that good buildings such as our new building have integrity, too.

Let's cooperate with our gracious and loving God, with our parents and our mentors who love us, and with one another to make this the best year of our lives – until next year.

I close with these words from Psalm 25:

Let integrity and uprightness preserve me: For I wait on thee. (Psalm 25:21)