

The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina

Keynote Presentation – Tom Mullikin

Baccalaureate Service on Thursday, 02 MAY 2019 - Summerall Chapel

Thank you for allowing me to speak to such a wonderful group of future leaders. I am honored to be asked to join you for this Baccalaureate - a celebration honoring graduates from one of the finest colleges in the United States. We join together to recognize and celebrate your accomplishments and worship towards the faithfulness of God.

These same godly principals and ideals helped form this nation, this prestigious university and these principals will be the standard that define your life.

Your efforts over the last four years have burned into your soul the character of a Citadel leader.

Character is an interesting and fleeting expression in our culture today. But it is this character that you should uphold and guard until your last breath. It is the character of a soldier - where honor and selflessness are cherished - and one upholding the highest personal standards. You carry the torch of many who have gone before you who have faced life's many temptations and have stood guard over their character and their soul.

The fourth-century philosopher Aristotle, in *Nicomachean Ethics*, opined that character is a disposition of the appetitive and emotional faculties, which leads its possessor to act and feel in particular ways. This disposition is acquired through habituation, a process that develops the intellectual as well as the appetitive and emotional faculties. Aristotelian virtues are dispositions informed by practical wisdom—a capacity for judgment developed through experience and reflection, which guides conduct where technical knowledge cannot. Aristotle reasoned that our characters are voluntary, and that our actions are voluntary, and our characters are the products of our

actions. I know that each of you understand the value and the practical application of habituation. (Perhaps from shining your boots or polishing brass, or even for the lucky few walking tours).

As you have surely seen already, doing the right thing is not always simple, even though few people deliberately choose to develop nasty habits.

Aristotle sharply disagreed for example with Socrates's belief that knowing what is right- always results in doing it. The great enemy of moral conduct is precisely the failure to behave well even on those occasions when one's deliberation has resulted in clear knowledge of what is right.

These characteristics and the opportunity to do what is right and prosper are the very cornerstone of our nation. A nation borne out of an intense belief in Judeo-Christian principals.

I am confident that many of the learned religious leaders who have spoken from this same haloed pulpit have delivered an evangelical message. 'Evangelical' relates back to the Greek noun 'Euangelion,' translated as 'good news' or 'gospel', the last of which goes back to an Old English word for 'God Talk'. It is this good news that

inspired, framed and built the United States of America and served as the foundation for our new nation.

"We are a religious people," exclaimed Supreme Court Justice Douglas writing for the United State Supreme Court. Our American experiment is one rooted and born out of religious precepts. It is no surprise that the First Amendment of the United States Constitution - the first protection set forth in our Bill of Rights - speaks directly to religious freedoms and protections. While there have been attempts to marginalize these broad protections, we are a "religious people" whose systems of government are well rooted in Judeo-Christian values.

The framers of our Constitution carefully considered the nature and extent of religious protections before the final Constitution was adopted. Reflecting upon the tremendous task of writing the Constitution, Alexander Hamilton stated in The Federalist Papers No. 84 that "the most considerable of the remaining objections" to ratification was that there was "no bill of rights" in the proposed Constitution.

The framers thereafter enveloped the important safeguards of individual liberties contained within the Bill of Rights which included protections found within the Magna Carta, or "Great Charter". To

understand the deep correlation of these rights with

religious freedoms, an examination of the

introductory language of the Magna Carta, is

revealing. In pertinent part, this language reads:

"Know that before God, for the health of our soul and those of our ancestors and heirs, to the honor of God, the exaltation of the holy Church..." As is plain from reading no further than the introductory language of the Magna Carta, the document commenced as a religious instrument concerned with the "health of the soul," the "honor of God," and with the "exaltation of the Holy Church." (Magna Carta 1215, Introduction).

In further illustration of the significance of religion

and religious freedoms, the Magna Carta evidences that "[f]irst, that we have granted to God, and by this present charter have confirmed for us and our heirs in perpetuity, that the Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished, and its liberties unimpaired." The religious cornerstone within the United States Bill of Rights cannot be overstated. We are, as Justice Douglas so aptly noted, a religious people. Recent efforts have been made to erode this fundamental principle, which has become a matter of intense debate by communities and groups dedicated to diluting these clear rights and protections.

The signing of the Magna Carta was an achievement for

Christian values over pagan concepts. "The signing of the Magna Carta represented nothing less than the culmination of a centuries-long war between the pagan and the Christian concepts of law and power." The victory for England, and thus for the United States of America through the Bill of Rights, was a resounding success for religious rights. The underlying foundation of our Bill of Rights included the long-fought and considered protections of the Church - "undiminished and its liberties unimpaired." While our war of independence separated us from the noose of the British Rule, these Christian principals and religious rights remain foundational in the government of our great nation.

As one of the largest military uniformed bodies in the United States, each of you continue the long tradition of carrying forward these principals. Whether in uniform or as a pillar in your community.

As you move forward into your career, if you have not already, you will soon begin to realize that life is very short. You may think that life will go on forever but understand, as you one day will, how short our life on earth really is. As King David said more than 2,000 years ago: "Lord, make me to know my end. And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am. Behold, You have made my days as

handbreadths, And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight;

Surely every man at his best is a mere breath."

These words as we read in Psalm 39 are both timeless

and true. Your life is - our lives are - but a mere

handbreadth.

The Core Values of your life learned here at the

Citadel as Aristotle puts it through "habituation",

include Honor, Duty and Respect. Life is an applied

science and one that will challenge you in many

ways. These values should serve as your anchor.

So I urge you today to hold tight to the Core Values that you have learned here at the Citadel and allow them to guide your actions and inform your character.

1. Honor which means simply "doing the right thing when no one is watching."

2. Duty

3. Respect - First and foremost respect means to treat other people with dignity and worth - the way you want others to treat you. Respect for others eliminates any form of prejudice, discrimination, or harassment.

So what will you make of your life?

I am reminded of the words of Ronald Reagan who implored Americans to understand that "Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction, we didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream". It must be fought for and handed on for them to do the same. You now move forward carrying with you the tremendous burden of protecting these freedoms. While our revolution for independence removed our beloved nation from British rule, these important writs of personal liberties were embedded into our Bill of Rights.

Here is what I offer to you as I stand as close to the finish line of my life, and as you stand close to the start:

1. BE BOLD - Never accept mediocrity when the Lord has blessed with you so much. You can be the best in the world in whatever you do, so never settle for anything less. Solomon said in Proverbs 28:1 that "The wicked flee when no one is pursuing them, but the righteous are as bold as a lion." Move forward with your life with purpose and be bold as you pursue your God given blessings.

2. BE STRONG - This also means be strong enough to love. Love strong! Love your family every day. Love your neighbor as yourself. And Love those less fortunate. King David said in Psalms 46:1 that "God is

our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." Every hero in Scripture, without exception, overcame obstacles and opposition. King David writes:

"They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He delivered me because He delighted in me. For by You I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall. It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer and sets me on my high places. For You have armed me with strength for the battle. Go forward and be strong as you make our world a better place.

3. BE KIND - Never let ambition strip away your kindness. As you grow older, you will find that no amount of worldly success will give you the happiness that helping out and giving to another will provide. Find that balance. It is the real challenge in life. Add value to other people every day. These acts of kindness will feed your soul and increase your blessings.

4. BE THOUGHTFUL - As you plan your life, concentrate on the challenges and opportunities. Time will become your predator, so use your time wisely. Consider the great Sun Tzu, who said: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a

hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle." Build your leadership on your faith it will be an unyielding foundation.

And finally,

5. REMAIN CONSISTENT, TENACIOUS AND FOCUSED ON YOUR

GOALS. YOU CAN BE THE BEST IN THE WORLD! Proverbs

12:28 says, "In the way of righteousness there is life;

along that path is immortality. These ancient paths of

righteousness are given to you out of God's marvelous

love and mercy." So I urge you to follow your dreams,

your passions and the blessings that the lord has

bestowed on you. I was born with severely deformed feet and legs; my parents were told I would never walk. The Lord had different ideas and after multiple surgeries and therapy I followed my passions. In January I returned from a climb up Mount Everest and over the last forty years I have climbed mountains on every continent and enjoyed dives in every ocean. My feet have carried me where doctors said I would never go. The Lord has blessed me and he has blessed each of you. Believe in the Lord and in yourself. There is greatness in each of you, as demonstrated by successfully graduating from this great institution. Psalm 107 promises when you're lost and desperate and call out to God, God will rescue you. God will put your feet on a

wonderful road— a path that takes you straight to good places. Jesus himself declares "I am the way" and he's already told us what to do: take the narrow way!

As you graduate you will leave beyond these walls and move into the next phase of your life. So in closing I simply ask you to consider the words of Dr. Martin Luther King that... "We must remember that intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education."

Thank you, congratulations, and may the Lord continue to richly bless and protect you.