

Thanks, Class of 2020, for Our Ordinary Times

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

As a teacher, I have mixed feelings about graduations.

I love the joy, pageantry and traditions that make these celebrations true highlights of academic life and happy milestones for graduates and their families. Yet, for me, commencements are also tinged with sadness. While they launch new beginnings for graduates, they are also bitter-sweet farewells to students I have come to cherish.

This year, like teachers everywhere, I will not say good-bye to the Class of 2020 in the same way I bid farewell to their predecessors. I'll miss that, and it would not surprise me if many who are blessed to spend their lives as teachers feel the same way. So, to the Class of 2020...

I will miss seeing the pride in your parents' faces – and seeing in them the echoes of my own parents' joy when my siblings and I received our degrees long ago.

I will miss your embarrassed “*Oh no!*” when your Dad asks me “*How did she do in your class?*” I might even miss that dread I feel when your Mom tells me, “*I've heard all about you!*” because I am not sure if that is necessarily a good thing.

I will miss watching each of you receive your diplomas – and, as your names are called, remembering your sorrows and triumphs along the way.

I will miss the annual confusion about which side of your hats the tassels should fall – a confusion that becomes comically obvious when you are instructed to shift your tassels from one side to the other when your degree is conferred.

I will miss seeing the tears in the eyes of your grandparents – and remembering, with gratitude, the way education was so cherished by my own immigrant grandparents.

I will miss leafing through the formal listing of your names in the program and learning that some of you have beautiful middle names I never knew – as well as many advanced degrees you were too modest to tell me about.

I will miss meeting your families and congratulating your parents, your spouses and your children. I know, as you know, that your hard won achievements are theirs as well.

I will miss being with my colleagues on the staff and faculty as we share our pride in you and our common joy that, in our many different ways, we each contributed a little something to get you to the finish line.

I will miss praying with you at your graduation Mass on the eve of your Commencement and asking God to bless the paths that you will travel.

But most of all, Class of 2020, I will miss *you*.

You were once strangers to me and to each other. Through many different paths, we came together for a time and shared a unique season of our lives. I am grateful I had those years with you, even though this time has ended in a way none of us would have predicted when first we met.

Some of you have known great joy during these years we have shared as you welcomed children, became aunts or uncles, achieved academic success, and wear new rings on your fingers. Some of you have known great sorrow and miss loved ones who started this journey with you but are not at your side now to share your joy. Some of you may have exciting prospects that lie right ahead of you. For some, this pandemic may have stolen more from you than your graduation celebration. For most of you, and for me, the time we spent together included both joys and sorrows -- just like life itself. For the way we were able to spend these years together, and the way you so often inspired me with your everyday kindness to each other, to our community, and to me, I am deeply grateful.

So, Class of 2020, when we can gather someday to celebrate you, I hope that you will come. I hope that when good news comes your way, you will let me rejoice with you – and if sad news comes your way, you will let me mourn with you. I hope that you will come back to visit your school soon and often. I hope that when alumni events beckon, your class will be among the first to return. I hope that when you use something you learned in my classes, you will let me know – and when there is something you *wish* you had learned in my classes, I hope that you will let me know that too. I hope that when I check my phone or my emails in the years to come, there will be voices from the Class of 2020.

Although I may not yet have said a formal “good-bye” to you, I hope that in the years to come, you will give me many chances to say “hello.”

And, maybe, I really *do* want to say “good-bye.”

Our most common word of farewell is, actually, an ancient abbreviation of the phrase, “*God go with you.*” So, to all those whose diplomas bear the date “2020,” I pray that God does go with you as you embark into a fragile world. Please bring that world your courage, your hope and your love – and thanks for sharing with me some of your ordinary times.

Congratulations! May God go with you, Class of 2020.

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