

Homily  
Shanley Baccalaureate  
May 21, 2025

“And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit...” Dear brothers and sisters, I think we could all say that today a lot of hopes have been fulfilled. Papers and projects are finished, and finals have been passed. It’s the day of your graduation. For four years you have been looking forward to this day, you’ve worked hard for it, and now you have made it through and reached the finish line. And for that we can all be thankful. I know your parents and your teachers are happy for you, and we are all very proud of you.

But my friends, this is only the beginning, and I’m sure you have even greater hopes yet to be fulfilled. This is a day for big dreams, lofty ambitions, and great hopes. As you all know, we’re in a Holy Year right now, a year of Jubilee. It’s a time of spiritual celebration and challenge, a time to rejoice in the hope we have in Christ. When Pope Francis called for this jubilee, he said the theme for this year would be “Pilgrims of Hope.” A pilgrim is one who is on a journey, a sacred journey, and this graduation day begins a new part of your journey, your pilgrimage. Many of you are moving on to college or university, others to a new job. I’m sure you’re thinking about the direction your lives will take. New friends await you, new relationships, someday perhaps a spouse and family too, or even a religious vocation. There are so many possibilities out there, new things to hope for and to look forward to. And as Paul tells us, “Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts...”

But the kind of hope Paul is talking about isn’t just wishful thinking. The kind of hope he speaks of is the hope that’s rooted in Christ. Sometimes the world will disappoint us, and sometimes we will disappoint ourselves. But if our hopes are founded on Jesus, then we won’t be disappointed, because Jesus is always faithful, and he wants nothing but good for us, and especially for you. So whatever hopes you have today, and in the days ahead, make sure they’re built on Christ. He loves you deeply, more than any of us can imagine, and if your hopes are based on him, then you’ll never be disappointed.

Sometime during your years at Shanley, I suspect you have heard about Blessed Piergiorgio Frassati. Piergiorgio was a young man from northern Italy about a hundred years ago. He came from a pretty affluent family, he had many friends, he was athletic and talented. He had a special love for mountain climbing, and one of his favorite sayings was “verso l’alto,” or “to the heights.” But the heights he was talking about weren’t just the mountains. He was aiming for even higher things, for the things of God. Even though his family was part of the elite of Turin, he spent much of his free time helping ordinary people in need. He gave away his own clothing and whatever money he had. He visited the sick, and he brought encouragement to anyone who was sad and without hope. He was a joyful, hopeful man, and his hopes were built on Christ. He went to Mass and received the Eucharist every day if he could, and urged his friends to build their lives on Christ. He was always reaching for the heights, the heights of God, and he wanted to bring others with him. When he died of polio at the young age of 24, the streets of Turin were lined with thousands of people who were mourning, because they had all been touched by Piergiorgio’s charity, and hope, and joy.

And what was his secret? He aimed for the heights, and he gave himself away. He always reached for God in his life, and he lived by what Jesus tells us in the Gospel: “Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” Piergiorgio wasn’t focused just on keeping to himself, he was focused on God and he wanted to serve others. He joyfully gave of himself and found the life that God intended him to have.

So my dear friends, on this joyful day, this day when you can all feel very proud, this day when you will strike out in a new direction, I offer these thoughts to you. Be a friend and a servant to others. Love is its own reward, and as Jesus says, “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” If you really want to find your way, the path that will bring you the greatest fulfillment and joy, then give of yourself freely as Piergiorgio did, and as Jesus did. Put God first in your lives, and build your hopes on the promise of Jesus to be with you always. Be a pilgrim of hope, a journeyer who trusts in the God who keeps his promises. And remember that saying: “Verso l’alto...to the heights!” Don’t settle for small, earthbound hopes. Set your eyes and the deepest hopes of your heart on greater things, on the things that God has in store for you here on earth and in eternity.