

over your shoulder, but to get involved deeply and to shoot for the moon. To beware of lawyers and consultants and people who do not take risks and who do not get their hands dirty. There are even more experts today than there are problems, but there is no greater strength than an open mind combined with a willingness to take risks. Middlebury opened my mind, as I am sure it did yours. In order to take risks, however, you have to go in harm's way. What happens then and how you perform, will depend on the fates as well as on your character. ■

GOVERNOR MARIO CUOMO SPEAKS OVER THE HEADS OF THE GRADUATES TO THE PARENTS

"We have for a full lifetime taught our children to be go-getters. Can we now say to them that if they want to be happy they must be go-givers?"

THE GOVERNOR OF NEW YORK is often a political leader with the potential for national stature, and Mario Cuomo made the most of a keynote address at the 1984 Democratic National Convention to establish himself as a party leader; his emotional evocation of "family values," combined with a view of the nation as an extended family, marked him as a politician to watch.

In that same summer, on June 3, 1984, he delivered a commencement

address to Iona College, in New Rochelle, New York. As he wrote to the anthologist, "This is certainly not a great speech, but it is my favorite. Others have received more attention; this one says best what is most important to me."

Cuomo is a politician, like Adlai Stevenson, who pays close attention to words and writes many of his own speeches. When a columnist chided him for convoluted "Jesuitical reasoning," the governor quickly countered with "That's how little you know—it's Vincentian reasoning."

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... It was an Irishman who gave me the best advice I've ever been given about the art of delivering a commencement speech.

Father Flynn was the president of my alma mater, St. John's, and the first time I was ever asked to speak at a graduation, I asked him how I should approach it.

"Commencement speakers," said Father Flynn, "should think of themselves as the body at an old-fashioned Irish wake. They need you in order to have the party, but nobody expects you to say very much."

That's advice I intend to remember today. . . .

I know that you are thinking—good parents and grandparents, loved ones of the graduates—what I'm thinking. "We've been through it all, at least most of it, or a lot of it. There's so much ahead that they ought to know about. So many temptations they should ignore. So much we can tell them about how to begin answering these hard questions.

We have the *obligation* to tell them, to reduce as much as possible the pain of their learning only from their own blunders.

We have the obligation. But do we have the right?

Can we, who found the ultimate truth so elusive for so long, tell them with confidence now of the futility of gathering up riches and the things of the world?

It's clear to us that all the newly won power over space and time, the conquest of the forces of nature, the fulfilling of age-old challenges, have not made us any happier or surer of ourselves.

We have built rockets and spaceships and shuttles; we have harnessed the atom; we have dazzled a generation with a display of our technological skills. But we still spend millions of dollars on aspirin and psychiatrists and tissues to wipe away the tears of anguish and uncertainty that result from our confusion and our emptiness.

Most of us have achieved levels of affluence and comfort unthought of two generations ago.

We've never had it so good, most of us.

Nor have we ever complained so bitterly about our problems.

The closed circle of pure materialism is clear to us now—aspirations become wants, wants become needs, and self-gratification becomes a bottomless pit.

All around us we have seen success in this world's terms become ultimate and desperate failure. Teenagers and college students, raised in affluent surroundings and given all the material comforts our society can offer, commit suicide.

Entertainers and sports figures achieve fame and wealth but find the world empty and dull without the solace or stimulation of drugs.

Men and women rise to the top of their professions after years of struggling. But despite their apparent success, they are driven nearly mad by a frantic search for diversions, new mates, games, new experiences—anything to fill the diminishing interval between their existence and eternity.

We know because we've been there. But do we have the right to tell these graduates that the most important thing in their lives will be their ability to believe in believing? And that without that ability, sooner or later they will be doomed to despair?

Do you think they would believe us if we told them today, what we *know* to be true: That after the pride of obtaining a degree and maybe later another degree and after their first few love affairs, that after earning their first big title, their first shiny new car and traveling around the world for the first time and having had it *all*—they will discover that none of it counts unless they have something real and permanent to believe in?

Tell me, ladies and gentlemen, are we the ones to tell them what their instructors have tried to teach them for years?

That the philosophers were right. That Saint Francis, Buddha, Muhammad, Maimonides—all spoke the truth when they said the way to serve yourself is to serve others; and that Aristotle was right, before them, when he said the only way to assure yourself happiness is to learn to give happiness.

Don't you remember that we were told all this when we were younger? But nevertheless, we got caught up in the struggle and the sweat and the frustration and the joy of small victories, and forgot it all. Until recently when we began to look back.

How simple it seems now. We thought the Sermon on the Mount was a nice allegory and nothing more. What we didn't understand until we got to be a little older was that it was the whole answer, the whole truth. That the way—the *only* way—to succeed and to be happy is to learn those rules

so basic that a shepherd's son could teach them to an ignorant flock without notes or formulae.

We carried Saint Francis's prayer in our wallets for years and never learned to live the message.

Do we have the right now to tell them that when Saint Francis begged the Lord to teach him to want to console instead of seeking to be consoled—to teach him to want to love instead of desiring to be loved—that he was really being intensely selfish? Because he knew the only way to be fulfilled and pleased and happy was to *give* instead of trying to get.

We have for a full lifetime taught our children to be go-getters. Can we now say to them that if they want to be happy they must be *go-givers*?

I wonder if we can, in good conscience, say these things to them today when we ourselves failed so often to practice what we would preach.

I wonder if we—who have fought, argued, and bickered and so often done the wrong thing to one another—are the ones to teach them love.

How do we tell them that one ought not to be discouraged by imperfection in the world and the inevitability of death and diminishment? How do we tell them when they lose a child, or are crippled, or know that they will themselves die too soon—that God permits pain and sickness and unfairness and evil to exist, *only* in order to permit us to test our mettle and to earn a fulfillment that would otherwise not be possible?

How can we tell our children *that*—when we have ourselves so often cried out in bitter despair at what we regarded to be the injustice of life—and when we have so often surrendered?

How can we tell them that it is their *duty* to use all that they have been given to make a better world, not only for themselves and their families, but for all who live in this world, when it was our generation that permitted two great wars and a number of smaller ones, our generation that made the world a place where the great powers are so alienated from one another that they can't even play together in an Olympics?

Do we have the right to tell them, as our teachers told us, that they have an obligation in justice to participate in politics and government? Can we without shame say to them that our system of democracy works well only when there is involvement by all? That in our democracy the policies that become law, the rules of justice, the treatment of individuals are the responsibility of *each* citizen? That you get what you deserve out of our system, and that indifference deserves nothing good?

When we ourselves have chosen to sit at home on so many election days muttering grim remarks about the politicians who appear on the television set, instead of doing what we could to change things, for the better?

Will they believe us if we said these things?

Would we be able to explain the embarrassment of our own failures?

Do you blame me, ladies and gentlemen, for being reluctant to deliver to them the message that is traditional on commencement day?

But maybe, ladies and gentlemen, this problem is not as great as I've made it out to be.

I've been taking a closer look at these graduates. They are actually taller, stronger, smarter than we were, smart enough maybe to take our mistakes as their messages, to make our weaknesses their lessons, and to make our example—good and not so good—part of their education.

I think I see in their eyes a depth of perception that perhaps we didn't have. A sense of truth, deeper and less fragile than ours.

As you talk to them, you get the feeling that they are certainly mature enough to see the real problems of our society: the need for peace, the need to keep pure the environment God offered us, the need to provide people the dignity of earning their own way.

Indeed, as I think about it, I have to conclude that these young people before me today are the best reason for hope that this world knows.

I see them as believers and doers who will take what we will pass on to them so clumsily, and make it something better than we have ever known. Honoring us by their works, but wanting to be better than we have been.

I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, looking at them now, closer and harder than I have before, I have a feeling about these people that makes me want to live long enough to see and be part of the world they will create.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, parents and grandparents, I would like to tell them, the graduates, all of this, and I know that if we thought they wouldn't be embarrassed by hearing it, we would all be telling them about how proud we are of them and how much we believe in them and their future. But again maybe we don't have to tell them; maybe they know. Maybe they can tell just by seeing the love in our eyes today.

Congratulations, ladies and gentlemen, on the good children you have cared for and raised. ■