

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS at The Ursuline School Commencement May 19, 2017

By Theresa Sol Cho

Mrs. Davidson, Ms. Killebrew, Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Lynch, Monsignor Keane, members of the Board of Trustees, esteemed faculty, staff, family, friends, and my beloved fellow members of the Class of 2017, welcome! I am honored to share this moment with you all on this wonderful day.

Whenever we reach a huge milestone in our lives, we tend to keep a memento that will remind us not only of the accomplishment itself but also of the journey that brought us there. Now that we are graduating from high school today, I think it's fitting to pose this question: If you could create a time capsule for your experiences at Ursuline, what would you like to put in it? Would you save your first Ursuline ID, assuming you still have it, in which you look like a deer in headlights with a swipe of mascara invisible to the naked eye and a polo slightly too large? How about the Ursuline sweatshirt that's stained with the various colors of Ring Day paint? What about the salad variations, burritos, Snapple drinks, and frozen yogurt that filled our stomachs and hearts? Let's not forget the Starbucks coffee dispenser and the red velvet muffins that visited us on special occasions. But on a serious note, there are a few precious items that all of us would put in our time capsules: our signed skirts, our yearbooks, and our rings.

Now, what if I were to say that you don't have to just save *physical* objects? What if we could save the excitement we had when we first walked through Ursuline's doors; that look we shared when we had simultaneously recalled our inside jokes from class; the smile we flashed as we passed each other in the halls; our teachers' daily greetings before class; the comforting shoulder that we relied on and that we once were for someone else; the killer moves we dancing

queens displayed at prom; the exhilaration we felt as we were participating in the very same traditions we had witnessed as underclassmen? What if we could save our **moments**?

Truth be told, our moments are in safekeeping right now. Our time capsules are actually present right now, all *160* of them. We all are the stewards of each other's precious moments at Ursuline. We all are witnesses to the legacies of our high school journeys.

In the novel The Five People You Meet in Heaven, Mitch Albom says, "...the human spirit knows, deep down that all lives intersect." All of us are here today; our lives have intersected, because of the common bond of Ursuline. Although we all came from different backgrounds, small family or big family, pet-owner or pet-admirer, star athlete or star karaoke singer, once we entered Ursuline, our experiences here have been so unique to us as a class and as individuals. There are probably few people like us who belted High School Musical's "Everyday" at 10 o'clock at night and posed excitedly on a lawn that spelled JESUS on our senior retreat. As we have experienced Camp Mariah, Ring Day, Prom, the stress of college applications, the mixed bag of emotions during college decisions, and the relief after sending in that May 1st deposit, we have taught each other, learned from each other, and created moments together. Like time capsules that are entrusted with precious items, we have become friends who trust each other to cherish our Ursuline memories and to keep them alive.

The insights of our past shape our present attitude towards our unknown future. Just as time capsules carry the lessons of the past for future generations, so too will we bring with us the academic, personal, and spiritual education of the Ursuline community as we start our next adventure. With the knowledge that we are Ursuline women – women of strength and wisdom – we can confidently stride toward our goals. We are not afraid to fail, to learn, and to start anew. Like airplanes that undergo turbulence as they fly around the world to their destination, we will

also occasionally experience turbulent circumstances as we travel toward our dreams. But, we need not fear. Remember what Amy March bravely says in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women: "I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship." The moments that we have built together, from the time when Ursuline was our unknown future to when Ursuline became our second home, have taught us the ropes for how to approach our next undiscovered future and have given us the courage to act when the journey becomes difficult.

We are now responsible not only for our individual development but also for the advancement of our world. As Ursuline women, we have the responsibility to be time capsules of Serviam. Wherever we find ourselves, we must learn about our community and help actualize its potential. We must seek not only to discuss problems but also to bring forth solutions. Rather than being only witnesses, we must become active stewards who empathize and positively influence those around us. We are called to give our ears to the unheard, our voices to the voiceless, and our hearts to the neglected. Through us and other Ursuline alumnae, Serviam lives on. We are the next generation of empowering, compassionate, and capable women that our world so desperately needs.

Last year in English, I read an essay - which was originally a commencement address - by American writer David Foster Wallace. He opens with an anecdote about two young fish who are swimming along and encounter an older fish who asks, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" Astounded, they later ask each other, "What the hell is water?" The ordinariness of what they're submerged in has literally escaped their notice. The essay's message is that even the ordinary moments - especially the ordinary moments - are what life is mostly made of. That makes them just as important as the extraordinary moments, like this one - our high school graduation. Be mindful: *This* is water. *This* is life. Enrich the lives of others. Take ownership of

your identity and your abilities. Live your life so that when you later unearth your time capsule, you can proudly look back on these moments and say, "*I was there.*"

Congratulations and good luck, Class of 2017. Now, off to the next adventure!