

Albyn School Leaving Ceremony

23rd June 2015

The Music Hall, Aberdeen

Governors, Headmaster, Leavers, Continuing Students, Parents, Colleagues and Friends; all of you.

My appreciation first of all for the invitation to give the prizes and awards this evening.

To have shared with you on this occasion is a privilege and an honour that I acknowledge with gratitude.

Likewise if I may be permitted I would also like to acknowledge the achievement of your school in having brought each of you to this point tonight.

In the course of the year my principal point of contact has been with a senior group with whom I have engaged at a significant level of philosophical discourse. The exchanges were profound and speak volumes for the way those who spoke with me have been prepared, at all levels of their school life, for what lies ahead of them next.

If they are a test sample of the rest then my admiration rises yet further for you all.

As pupils you are moving on. So too might some members of staff. Others remaining, though each refocusing and adapting to changing personnel, pupils and circumstances.

Crucial in all of this is learning how to develop and grow through the experiences that life throws your way.

From personal experience one of my early major gaffs when a junior priest was going to one of Scotland's most prestigious boarding schools to speak at a Sunday service.

At that time the school was principally for boys, girls being admitted at only senior level.

Anyway, and speaking of sport, I referred, would you believe, to the school First XI football team. Not a clever thing to do in that circumstance.

As I uttered those words 400 pairs of eyes collectively rolled upwards and simultaneously I realised that for the first time in my sheltered life there were football teams that had fifteen as their normal playing number.

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A trivial mistake on my part at one level. But dealing with mistakes is crucial in forming the person you need to become. And addressing what you get wrong at the trivial level is as equally vital as is dealing with where you mess up important on important things.

On another occasion and wanting to get things right, again as a junior priest, I spent some time getting one of my first funerals atmosphere and word perfect.

It was to be duly sombre and ordered.

What happened when the hearse arrived at the church was that there were two coffins, not one. Unbeknown to me was the fact that the chap's dog had died the day after he had and that in his will he had asked that when his Alsatian died it was to be buried where he was buried.

The undertaker saw my bemused look, explained that it was the man's dog in the other coffin, and that the family had requested that if both coffins were brought along perhaps they could do a deal along the lines of 'buy one, get one free'.

Well cutting aside the fact that my church never charges for funerals it meant that my sombre service was thrown out of the window and, on the hoof, I had to do the service in much more light-hearted vein than I had anticipated.

That at least taught me always to expect the unexpected and be prepared to step lightly, and sometimes humourously, in the way we deal with life's otherwise tragic and sad situations.

So as you move on be ready to make mistakes and be ready for the unexpected.

How you deal with each will be a significant marker of the person you are. And this will be so whether you're in the Motor Trade (as was the case with one leaver I met last year), a Meteorologist, a Musician or, let it not go unsaid, even a Theologian!

As you move into the next sphere of your lives and thereafter, the qualities of character that will increasingly define who you are will be portrayed in what you do.

Good personal qualities are not automatic. They need to be developed and nurtured.

Qualities that include firstly, and amongst others, integrity; by which I include truth-telling, faithfulness in dealing, honesty in relationships.

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Secondly, generosity of spirit. Here I refer to the character traits of kindness, thoughtfulness, helpfulness, openness to the needs of the other person.

And third, I offer you compassion. Exercise sympathy for the other, for the world around you.

Fourth, I come to courtesy with the list by no means exhausted. Courtesy is an old-fashioned virtue much in need of current rehabilitation.

All of these: integrity, generosity of spirit, compassion and courtesy are qualities and virtues which, along with numerous others, must mark your life's dealings and interactions if you are to be a person whom others will respect.

Others will assess and judge you by what they experience of you. And from my perspective I say that God will do so as well.

They are qualities and virtues which, if developed by you, will protect you from making wrongful accusation, from doubtful dealing and from needlessly hurting another.

So as you move on in to the next sphere of your lives, or as a new adventure comes the way of any of you, I wish you every blessing and success.

Again, to you all, my thanks and appreciation.

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Aberdeen, June 23rd 2015