

Speeches
Address delivered by the Honorable John E. Fogarty, Member of Congress from the Second Rhode Island District, at the Commencement Exercises at Saint Raphael's Academy in Providence, Rhode Island, on Monday, June 7, 1943.

My dear young men: -

Your school days are finished. Your life as boys will be no more. Fortified by the training you have received from the Brothers of the Christian Schools, you prepare to face the world's great challenge.

On an occasion such as this, graduating classes, at Colleges and Academies, are accustomed to listen to flights of oratory - and to great expositions of the virtues of Democracy and Freedom, and the eagerness of youth to bring to the darkened world the light of learning.

While I am deeply grateful for the singular privilege and the distinct honor which has been accorded me today, I am equally cognizant of my responsibility in speaking to you young men, who will be the citizens, the soldiers, the statesmen and builders of tomorrow.

So - if I fail in oratory - bear with me. I shall try to make up to you, in truth, what I lack in forensic appeal.

Only a few years ago - it seems to me now as yesterday - I sat just as you young men sit, and listened to a Commencement Day address. I, too, realized that I was ready, able and willing to meet, and to conquer, whatever problems the great World had to offer. You see, I had the privilege of studying under the Brothers of the Christian Schools - at La Salle.

You and I have much in common. I absorbed the teachings of the good Brothers just as you have done. I also entered the life which comes after graduation, during a crisis in the life of the Nation.

It was my lot to go out into a world in the throes of a terrible depression, when homes were crumbling - when greed and selfishness were rampant - and hunger and privation threatened to undermine the character of the people of America.

I have had an opportunity which you have yet to experience. I have seen the teachings of the Christian Brothers under fire - and I can say to you, in all sincerity, you have nothing to fear, if you will but cling fast to the principles you have learned here at Saint Raphael's. Those ideals of character will stand the test - - no matter what the temptation - no matter how rough the road - no matter how great the momentary adversity may seem, you have something which will enable you to prevail - if you will but be courageous.

The world into which you are about to enter beggars description. This whole planet - where once you traced the voyages of Marco Polo - of Magellan and Columbus - is seething with a terrible war. Those tropical islands which you have visualized as the symbol of peace and tranquility are today raging infernos. The romantic names of foreign lands are forgotten in the death-dealing clashes of opposing armies.

Because of your youth, there may be many who would discourage your inquiries into the basic causes of this great struggle in which our Nation is now fighting for her very life. There may be those who seek to allay your fears - to put at rest your worries - about our Nation's position in this great battle, and to halt your searching for the path which we, as a people, are to follow when this war will have ceased. With such reasoning I differ strongly.

You have nothing to fear from the truth - - you have much to fear if you fail to seek the truth. You young men bring to a world half-mad - - pure hearts and free minds, untainted by the prejudices of older men. You are still free from the overpowering emotions which will tempt your judgment as you come in contact with the stern realities of life. It is for that reason I believe it is not only your privilege, your right - - but it is your solemn duty - - to inquire into the causes of this latest war among men, and to inquire into the relation which this Republic bears to those causes and to the struggle itself.

Having found those truths, you will know best how to act - for with the men and women of your generation will rest, almost entirely, the decisions which will guide the Nation in the years of reconstruction which will follow the coming of peace.

I know you have read in books - in magazines of all sorts - and in the daily papers - the various elements which go to make up this thing we call Democracy. Your ears have often been left ringing by the declamations of great men, explaining the attributes of Democracy and the glorious traditions of this Republic which is the United States of America.

No doubt there have been times when you have wondered just what it is all about - when you sought in the tangle of claims and counter-claims, the real truth; when you wondered at the apparent bitterness that could exist between two men - or groups of men - who both loudly proclaimed their loyalty to Democracy. There will yet be times when you will know sorrow as you see men of opposing philosophies locked in what seems a battle from which but one can emerge alive and free. There will be times when you will experience the feelings of disillusionment and sadness as you witness man's inhumanity to man.

I know it is hard to grasp entirely these various elements which are embraced in the operations of our Democracy. To analyze and digest it all would require a super-man. To understand your relation to all this - to keep your head when all about you are losing theirs - you need only your faith in God, and the good common sense with which the Brothers have sought to inspire you.

In Saint Raphael's classrooms you have been taught the value of material things, and how those material things might be turned to the use of society. You have been told of man's discoveries - of man's development - of man's contest with the elements and of how human society has benefited by man's constant striving for improvement.

But always through your studies there was encouraged in your hearts and minds the natural love of law and the natural aspiration to liberty and freedom.

The Brothers have taught you - not the pagan theory that the State is the end toward which all effort must be directed - but that the State exists for the common good. You have learned that man possesses certain inalienable rights - - - those rights are not merely creations of the mind of man - they flow from the hand of man's Creator. Those rights are man's - to have and to hold at all times - not merely as it suits the whim of an all-powerful state, to be given, graciously, or to be taken away by some who might temporarily capture control of the State's administration. You have been told at Saint Raphael's that our Holy Mother the Church is the untiring defender and champion of those rights - that the Church can never associate herself, even for a little while, with those who worship at the shrine of the omnipotent state, for such action would accomplish only the debasement and enslavement of the Church.

That knowledge you have acquired is the knowledge of real Democracy, and that knowledge will serve you throughout all the rest of your life. It is the foundation of genuine freedom - not only of the body, but of the mind.

As you stand loyal to this teaching, you will find men who will sneer and admonish you to be practical - in a practical world. By "practical" they often mean "license". You will be told you must be more "liberal". You will learn that they often confuse "liberal" with "ignorance". There will be those who will tell you the world has grown old and has learned it does not need - and can find no place for - these principles which you regard as lode stars.

I tell you - in all humility - to hold tight to those teachings. Refuse to allow yourselves to be swayed from the path which the Brothers have taught you to know. Those principles - those ideals, if you prefer that word - are your only hope of sanity in a world gone mad. They are your guarantee of survival.

As you become familiar with the military, economic and political developments of the world about you, you will notice that man - in every crisis - returns to fundamental Catholicism. Humbly and suppliantly he acknowledges there are no atheists in fox-holes.

Fervently he prays God to bless his arms. Loudly he proclaims that the battle which he fights - whether it be a clash of arms or a striving against adversity - is fought for the greater Glory of God.

In your hands - in the hands of the men of your generation - is the opportunity of testing man's faith in his Creator. Whether we, as a people, shall continue to call on God to bless our efforts when there will be placed before us the temptations which cater to our baser selves is a decision which will be made by such men as you. Other generations of Americans will be tired and weary from the impact of the war we are waging to bring peace to you. Your generation will be fit, pray God, and it will be your responsibility. Don't fail those who will come after you. We have faith in you - all mankind prays you will not fail - for in such as you rests the future of this sick world.

You face life at a time when all you have been taught to believe in is under devastating fire. That fire will test your mettle, and your conduct will be taken to prove to the world how well the Brothers have discharged the duty which was theirs.

Until now, to a considerable extent, you have been sheltered from the harsh realities of a world where every resource which is known to man is devoted to the task of waging war - where men of intelligence and education devote their skill and their knowledge of the sciences, not to the relief of the ailments that beset mankind - except as it may better fit him to be a warrior - but, seemingly with a fanatical determination, these learned men devote their skills to the perfection of newer means of exterminating man and man's creations.

Your homeland - as you take your place in its ranks - is engaged in a war that must be fought to a completely victorious conclusion. Your homeland went to war for one reason, and one reason only - to guarantee that might shall never make right. We have but one genuine hope for the future - that we can contribute to the establishment of a peace that shall be permanent. That peace must be one in which there shall be cooperation in

the promotion - not of special interests or private ambitions - but in the promotion of the common welfare - - there must not be a renewed rivalry for the privilege of committing mass murder. To the accomplishment of our purpose, we must look to you and to the faith and courage which is yours. Don't make another generation of Americans pay the price for selfishness and blindness which is now being exacted from the best of America's sons.

I know youth doesn't ask for safety - youth has always sought the challenge and the contest. You have all that in the world you are about to meet. No generation ever faced greater dangers - - yet no generation ever met greater opportunities.

You men have ideals - cling to them. You have dreams - don't ever lose them. Our great cities have been built - our rivers have been spanned - and continents linked together - by men with dreams. In the world of tomorrow there will be plenty and to spare for the man who has dreams and who has the will to work with his hands and his intellect to make those dreams facts. As the bombed and harried peoples of the earth dig themselves out of the ruin and rubble of their shattered homes, and commence the task of rebuilding the world they once knew - - - as men lay down their arms and seek a quiet corner in which to lay down their weary heads - - - as the lights come up in all the grief-stricken cities of the world - there will be a place for your dreams - there will be work for your hands.

When that day comes, be ready to grasp the opportunity, and to meet the challenge which it will bring. Love America - have faith in the common man of America. So conduct yourselves in life that you can help to guide the America of the future along the path of social peace - where the worker will not be condemned to economic dependence and slavery, whether that slavery arises from the exploitation of private capital or from the power of the State. The past, with all its errors, is dead. The future, with all its promises, is all yours.

Your education here at Saint Raphael's assures you of the ability to succeed. Your faith assures you of protection.