

University of Notre Dame
Sending Ceremony
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Martin Sheen

Thank you so much. I am so grateful to you. I'm going through a humbling adjustment as was mentioned earlier. Due to my participation in *The West Wing* from 1999 to 2006, I was affectionately known across the country as the acting president of the United States. When the show was suddenly cancelled, I became affectionately known across the country as the acting former president of the United States. This has been a difficult adjustment and sometimes it has been downright humiliating.

Just yesterday, as I was boarding a plane in Los Angeles to come over here, a fellow passenger greeted me with, "Good morning Mr. President. Air Force One in the shop?" That wasn't bad enough. All during the flight there was an ancient couple seated behind me. They were both hard of hearing, and they both insisted they knew my history. In fact, neither one of them had a clue, which was demonstrated, finally, when the elderly woman in a very loud, husky whisper, insisted to her equally ancient companion, "No, no no. He is not Emilio Estévez's brother. He is Charlie Sheen's son!"

It gets worse. We landed in Chicago. I was headed to the baggage place and two little, pre-teenage girls went squealing up to me, "Oh, we love you, love you, love you! You're our favorite person in all the world! Please, please, please can we have your autograph?" "Of course" I said. I signed one, and another, and as they went off I heard one say to the other, "I can't make out his signature. Who did you say he was?"

I had a very limited connection to Notre Dame, until this weekend's events, but my

strongest association is through one of my heroes, who happens to be my attorney. He has been a very powerful influence in my life. I like to brag about his having won his letter in athletics here at Notre Dame. For four years he was the leprechaun. He was graduated in 1979 and he is a public defender in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. He is one of the great nourishments in my life. I know he is embarrassed but I want him to just please be acknowledged. Joe Cosgrove is sitting right over there.

I was reviewing some of the remarks that I have prepared for today with Joe last night and I said "I can't go on with this. I don't think I should talk about my athleticism." My athleticism certainly was nothing. I play every now and then in a Michael Douglas golf tournament, but that's really still amateur. But he keeps assuring me that I have not lost my eligibility for Notre Dame. Just after *The West Wing* ended, I was invited to take an honorary degree from the National University of Ireland in Galway, and I accepted because my mother was Irish, I love Ireland, I have a lot of relatives there, and I'm also an Irish citizen. So I went over, and, after the ceremony, the President greeted us at the reception and he asked me, "So now that *The West Wing* is over, what are your plans?" I said, "Well, I have enough degrees. I could use an education. What are the chances I could come here and study for awhile?" He said, "If you're serious, you'd be as welcome as the flowers." So I began thinking I've been getting a little older, much older, and the opportunities of going to college were becoming nil, so I thought this was the opportunity for fulfilling a lifetime fantasy.

So, I went to Galway in August of 2006. I rented a car and an apartment. I went to the campus and registered as the oldest student in the University, maybe in the University's history. In fact, I may have been older than the University, I wasn't sure. On my very first day on campus, headed to my very first class, I was stopped by a very serious young man, who asked,

“Hey, where’s your minder?”

“My what? What’s a minder?”

He said, “You know, your tug. Your bodyguard.”

I said, “I have none.”

“More power to you,” he said and was gone.

That was my introduction to higher education in Ireland.

I only lasted one semester. For one semester I studied earth and ocean science, English, philosophy, computers, and the only campus organization I joined was a sort of older persons’ student society, which I guess is a little like a senior-citizen here joining the AARP. Anyway, that is the extent of my college education. But we’ll see it’s not over yet.

When I was a struggling, young actor in New York, in the winter of 1959, I joined a very energetic, very radical group called The Living Theater, and their director was the first pacifist I’d ever met and the first vegetarian as well. His name was Julian Beck. He became one of my mentors. A dear man, God rest him, he hired me as a general understudy and stagehand at five dollars a week, and, mind you, I was worth every penny.

But as a compensation for such a pittance, he sent me downtown to Christopher Street, where he had a friend who ran a soup kitchen. It was free to anyone in need. No sermons and no questions asked. It was my kind of place, and I became a regular. I was going there for months before I realized it was named “The Catholic Worker”, and this man’s friend of course, was Dorothy Day, and thus began my long and cherished association with the Catholic Worker movement, which continues to this day.

The Worker, as you know, takes very seriously the command of the gospel to clothe the naked, house the homeless, feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, and love your enemy. Of equal

importance, it insists that we are called to non-violently confront the root causes of poverty, injustice, racism, and more, in short, to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

Dorothy Day died in 1980, and, although she would be the very last person in the world to show any interest in the process, the cause for her canonization is currently underway in the Vatican. Meanwhile, the movement she began in New York City in 1933 has spread across the country into every major inter-city, from coast to coast, including Washington D.C., Las Vegas, Nev., and South Bend, Ind. And if there's a young lady present here from that Catholic Worker house, named Sheila McCarthy, I got your message. Thank you so much, and I will try to get over there before I leave the community.

At any rate, the Catholic Worker house in Worcester, Mass., is celebrating the 75th anniversary this summer, July 9th through the 12th at Our Lady of Mount Caramel, Saint Anne's Parish Center, in Worcester. For information on the network, go to www.pieandcoffee.org/cw. Your hosts will be **Claire and Scott Schaeffer-Duffy**. Scott Schaeffer-Duffy is one of my heroes. I just saw him recently up in Boston, and I visited the Worker there.

Many of you Catholic Worker people know the famous story about Scott: As you know, radicals—peace people—have a reputation of being very serious-minded, and not in it for the laughs. Well, Scott Schaeffer-Duffy took on himself, a few years ago, an anti-war toy campaign. He made a Santa Claus outfit, complete with hat and beard, and a bag of toys and he made a big sign saying “No more war toys.” He then went out to the Worcester shopping mall and began to protest in front of Toys R Us just a few days before Christmas, and it didn't go down well with the manager of the store.

He came out and said, “Santa, what are you doing? You're killing my business here. Please, get away.”

And Scott said, “Look, I’m a pacifist. I believe children learn at a very young age, and in large measure they learn violence from war toys, and I’m here to protest that.”

The manager said, “Look if you don’t get out of here, I’m going to call the police.”

And Scott said, “Well, go ahead. I’ll face whatever is coming.”

The manager called the police, the cops came, and they said, “Santa, what are you doing? You’re ruining this guy’s business. Get outta here.”

And Scott repeated his commitment to pacifism, and to getting rid of war toys.

And the cop said, “Oh to hell with that. You don’t leave right now, you’re under arrest.”

Scott backed up against the door of Toys R Us. He reached into the bag and pulled out a big lump of black coal and said, “Don’t make me use this.”

Each time someone stands up for an ideal or acts to improve the lot of others or strikes out against injustice, they “send forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of repression and injustice.”

Those words were spoken at the University of Capetown in South Africa in 1966 by Robert Francis Kennedy. They are enshrined on his memorial at Arlington National Cemetery as well, and they have been a powerful source of inspiration for my generation ever since. My view is shaped by that and by the Third World, in large measure, from working in India, the Philippines, Kenya, Mexico, South Africa, and Central America. And while we’re seeing more and more of Third World America on our city streets, I still encourage young people to visit the other Third World, or what are being referred to today as the emerging countries, and to consider working there for the environment, or for the poor, for your poor self, in order to gain a more realistic point of view of the world and all we share.

I want to share with you, if I may, a rather astonishing scenario from *Earth as a Village*, by Phillip M. Harter, from the Stanford University School of Medicine. Some of you may already be familiar with it, but if not, consider the following:

If we could shrink the earth's population of over six and a half billion people down to a single village consisting of one-hundred people, with all the existing ratios the same, it would look something like this: There would be 57 Asians, 8 Europeans, 21 Africans, and 14 people from the Western Hemisphere.

There would be 52 women, and 48 men. There would be 70 non-whites and 30 whites. There would be 70 non-Christians, and 30 Christians. There would be 89 heterosexuals, and 11 homosexuals.

There would be no doctor, no nurse, no dentist, no hospital or clinic, and no school. There would be no safe drinking water. There would be no common language. There would be no electric power or paved roads. There would be 70 people unable to read or write. There would be 50 people starving from malnutrition. There would be 1 person near death and one person near birth.

The entire food supply for the village would depend entirely on outside sources, yet 6 people in the village would possess 59% of the entire village's wealth, and all 6 would be US citizens. There would be one television, one computer, and one college graduate.

And the average person in the village, would be a 13 year-old teenage girl.

The world is a much different place than when I came into it in 1940. There are infinitely more people with a far less certain future. It is a world gone mad, from hot and cold wars to self-inflicted wounds of poverty, greed, environmental disaster, and continuous violence. And your generation deserves a sincere and profound apology from my generation for receiving such a

pitiful inheritance. And while there is no excuse for our dismal failure, clearly you are left to accept the cup as offered, not altered.

But you're not the typical, average, young Americans, who generally see things as the way they are today and ask, "Why?" You are dreaming of things that never were, and ask, "Why not?"

The Irish tell a story of a man who came to the gates of heaven and asked to be let in. St. Peter said, "Of course. Show us your scars."

The man said, "I have no scars."

St. Peter said, "What a pity. Was there nothing worth fighting for?"

All over the country, indeed the world, many thousands of young people, like yourself, are gathering at this time of the year for Commencement. All have arrived at that critical time and place when one must seriously consider the course of one's future. Unfortunately, the majority will choose the road most often travelled, where less resistance is the norm. This road offers ample compensation for your time and talent, as long as your behavior is acceptable, your loyalties are a foregone conclusion, and your values are subject to occasional compromise. This road offers the most opportunities and there will be no shortage of fellow travelers, including any number of cynics, who know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

You may live a long and productive and reasonably contented life and even leave a reasonable inheritance. You may even be remembered for something more than that. But at journey's end, when you must consider what is next, you may be left to wonder about the other road, the one less travelled. This road is far less defined with no clear sign posts along the way; except for the ones you may choose to plant for those you hope will follow. Your destination is determined largely by your own instinct, and soon you may even discover that you have begun to

build the road yourself, to your own specifications.

Of course you will often remain uncompensated for your time and talent, and your behavior may only be acceptable to a precious few. But your loyalty and values are never subject to compromise. You may live a happy and even productive life, though you won't leave much of an inheritance, but you may leave a substantial legacy of social justice, and be a great source of spiritual nourishment for those who may choose to follow.

And, at journey's end, when you must consider the next great adventure to that undiscovered realm from which no traveler returns, the only things you can take with you are the things which you cherished, and gave away with love, including your precious time and talent.

I just want to close with a prayer. I love the number of prayers that are offered on this campus. Everyone is lifted up, every hour of every day in prayer. Before I came here I hesitated to share what I call the American Peacemaker's Prayer, but with all that I'm hearing here, I'm encouraged. So it's your own fault, brothers and sisters. Peace be with you!

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. We are left empty, and trembling at the level of confidence placed in the power of violent weapons, and the level of arrogance they have inspired in our national leadership, but you have taught us, Lord, that arrogance is ignorance matured, and that what we sow, we will also reap. Descend with us into the depths of our powerlessness and our fear, and awaken there the power of non-violent transformation as we discover your fire for the second time. Then Lord, let the light and heat from that fire make every thought, every word, and every deed a reflection of our loving, non-violent resistance to every wretched form of violence, so that we may be made worthy of the long promised blessings reserved for the peacemakers and for those who show mercy. Lord, make us non-violent instruments of your peace, so that we may lift up this world and all its people, to a place:

“Where the heart is without fear and the head is held high.
Where knowledge is free
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow, domestic walls
Where words come out from the depth of truth
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary, desert sands of dead habit
Where the mind is led forward by thee
Into ever widening thought and action
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let our country awake.”
Amen.

Thank you.