

Thank you Mrs. Carroll for the honor of addressing this Seton graduating Class of 2022. / It is my pleasure to welcome those who've traveled long distances to be here today, to you proud parents, siblings, alumni, and faculty to graduation day at Seton.

Conquistador graduates of 2022, I stand before you with heartfelt respect - you've just wrapped up school work at one of the finest institutions of Catholic learning on the eastern seaboard of America.

When Mrs. Carroll extended the invitation for me to speak today, I fell quiet for a few moments to recall each of the commencement speeches I've been fortunate to hear. /// Thereafter - I realized I didn't recall a single syllable of any of those speeches - and not only that, I wasn't even able to recall who spoke. So with that - I reached for my laptop, opened my browser, and typed In "commencement speeches." And up popped YouTube videos of capped and gowned Taylor Swift, Oprah, an actor from the tv show The Office, and President Joe Biden.

I shut my laptop.

After some time - I did what I'd been taught to do since I was a small child — I called on our Blessed Mother, and asked that she'd intercede through the Holy Spirit to tell me what to say.

After a week or so - a single word came. As time pushed forward, closer to today - the word grew more powerfully in me. /// Frankly, I didn't want to share it with you today - but since I do believe God spoke it to me in prayer - we'll have to oblige it - won't we?

If you'll permit me, though, I want to build up to it for a minute.

Fifty years ago, Mrs. Carroll and her husband Warren paid witness to the convergence of two approaching storms. At the same time the sexual revolution and its accouterments began storming into the world, thousands of revolutionary priests and nuns began trashing their collars and habits and working to re-engineer 2,000 years of God's revealed Truth. Within the span of a few years, large segments of the Catholic Church, societal customs, and the nuclear family had ruptured. An invisible poisonous gas, it seemed, had seized the conscience of the entire world.

An Irish shepherd once told me that potato farmers during the Great Famine used to stand atop their highest hill to watch low-lying green clouds slowly push over their crop to kill every last potato.

In a sense, Warren and Anne Carroll stood as these helpless potato farmers. The cloud they beheld, though, was more devastating. It carried with it the unraveling of the foundation of God's Laws. At its root - devotion to God - worldwide - was being replaced by the devotion of self. Overnight, large segments of humanity and the Church had lost the plot.

But way back then - standing within the heart of the crisis - the Virginia couple became animated by a single thought — “Dearest God, how would you have us respond to protect the young ones now.” Their first thought was you. — no hesitation. It was you. They suddenly become like Superheroes out of an old Marvel comic book - and took up arms to valiantly fight the invisible poisonous gas of Modernism. Their weapons were the sincere worship of God, an intensified prayer life, hardiness, and untiring sacrifice and work. And within a few years, Seton was established. Thereafter, building contractors were pouring foundations and laying cinderblock at Christendom College.

That cloud of destruction - it was broken apart in Virginia - seemingly by the hands of God working through the Carrolls and their hardy band of helpers.

Over the last half-century in Virginia, numberless children born in the wake of the moral sea change and deconstruction of Catholic transcendence were offered order, the resplendence of the faith, and tranquility. From the very beginning - high standards were set. I don't need to tell you the manner in which your academically rigorous courses pushed you. You've been given uncompromising magisterial teaching, and hard-working, virtuous instructors who welcomed you each morning in an environment that urged you to become saints.

*Man!!!* if only there were 50 or so other Warren and Anne Carroll's in 1970 - what a more ordered world we'd have.

A single wall splits the world in two today. *!!!* An ongoing, worldwide, systematic attack on Truth and the eternal soul surges more powerfully each day - and on one side of the wall are those who genuflect to God - on the other are those who genuflect to the world. One side worships an eternal God; the other a god who's evolved, a god who's greenlighted and blessed re-engineered moral norms. On one side are those devoted to prayer, on the other are those who don't pray. *!!!* One side

fights one's nature to achieve virtue; the other obliges his body to attain comfort. // One side dies to self and lives. The other lives for self and dies. On one side - willing saints rise; on the other - demons roam. Time limits us here from further elucidation.

You must choose your side of the wall. /// Seton graduates - right now is a time for choosing - because it is not only our world that is under moral collapse - it is our Church - a Catholic church caught up in the midst of a long wintertime. Growing handfuls of bishops have entered what seems undeclared apostasy - a subversive set of clergy strives for new sexual norms. Today at the Vatican, a Pride flag ripples in the breeze at the US embassy - and no Catholic there has the courage to tear it down. Less than 30 percent of laity believe in the Real Presence. Many millions of Catholics who were told by bishops they could leave the Mass at Covid - well, they never came back. ///// The distinguishing mark of the 1st-century Christian was his willingness to suffer, die, and be buried with Christ. /// The distinguishing mark *of the modern Catholic* is one who wants to fit in with the world. //

I attended 16 years of Catholic schools - but I cannot give this type of address at those schools. I give it here at Seton - because you are the vanguard. Truly, it is

you - Seton graduates - that offer rays of hope that can lead this Church from its wintertime. It will be you - not the rich and powerful - and in a certain sense - it will not be the clergy - it will be you. /// You have been called to great things now. What you absorbed here at Seton is non-reversible. There's no turning back.

Seton graduates - choose your side of the wall.

I imagine - if you were asked today - most of you would tell mom and dad that you've chosen the right side of the wall. // But the training wheels come off today - today begins the adventure. Today begins your time of testing. And God *will* test you. And He'll test you again. And again. /// So right now, as you slide into these pleasant and leisurely summer months, it might not be a bad idea to begin to consider how you'll fasten yourself to God and the safe side of the wall. This summer, begin to ask yourself in prayer whether you have what it takes.

I'd argue that right now - June 6, 2022 - is the greatest time since the first century to be a disciple of Christ. Why? Because every single one of you - if you strive to live your faith to the full - you will suffer and be persecuted. // But since the beginning of time - since before Adam and Eve, even before the creation of the world, God looked with love upon each one of you aware that this was your hour.

Since the beginning of time, he's given you this hour. His plan for your life has been set from the beginning of time. But to oblige it - it will have to be earned.

Because let's be honest - it's very hard to be Catholic today. It wasn't when I was a kid; it wasn't when Mrs. Carroll was a teenager. We had it easy - not now. If you simply stand for basic human rights, embrace your faith in its fullness, and object to the diabolical mosaic of gender transitioning, fraudulent marriage, critical race ideologies, and the hyper-wokeness of the world - you *will* be persecuted.

Downer commencement address - right? /// No! This is a time for great rejoicing.

Why?

Because Seton graduates, you've been invited into *the* most intimate act of friendship with Christ you can imagine. If you simply live Catholic today - you will in a very real way begin to walk Golgotha with Jesus Christ. In fact - I'll just say it - he doesn't need Simon of Cyrene anymore. He's sent him home. It's you he needs. Christ - right now - asks you - if *you will* bear and embrace the full weight of his cross. And it will be in his passion that he'll look *to you* through his blood-stained face, nod his affirmation and beckon you further.

Will you walk Golgotha with him? Can you?

If that's a collective YES I hear //// wonderful news /// but to be a deliberate Catholic today robust in your faith is not for the faint-hearted. But here's the trick to make it work - As a sportswriter, I've covered some of the greatest athletes who've ever lived - Michael Jordan, Shaq, Cal Ripken, Ken Griffey, Jr. Each one suffered, sacrificed, and endured pain to bring about something bigger than themselves. For five decades, this was the life of Anne Carroll. I doubt any of you have ever thought of Mrs. Carroll as Michael Jordan-like - but the fact is - she is. She suffered and sacrificed and grit her teeth to bring about something remarkable for you. // You /// you are her heirlooms - you are her descendants.

I am begging you now - begging you - to be the warriors for God and heroes of conscience that Mrs. Carroll was for you - the saints that she and your Seton instructors trained you to become for this day. /// Will you suffer for God now - even to a greater degree than Warren and Anne Carroll? Will you extend yourselves past even what they managed? Why? /// Why must you?

Because what you took in here at Seton is non-reversible. An icon of order and sacredness has been carved into you. You cannot shake it. /// (PAUSE)

Last week I spent a wonderful evening with two priests - they were brothers from Argentina. They told me they had three other brothers who were also priests - with a sixth brother in seminary. These priests carried a deep joy. Toward the end of dinner, I asked them - which one of you six brothers is gonna be the first to die a martyr? Who will spill his blood? /// after a long pause - the priests looked at one another and a joy swelled in them. These Braveheart priests know the stakes; they know their identity as the slaughtered lamb. They know what's demanded of them in the days where God's Laws fall like dominoes.

Now graduates - when I shut down the Oprah and Taylor Swift commencement shows - what was the single word the Holy Spirit gave to me for you. //// It was martyrdom. //// And what is the question the Holy Spirit gave me to ask you — Are you Seton graduates of 2022 - are you willing to embrace martyrdom?

Don't answer. I'll answer for you — No. /// Not a single one of you is — not right now anyway. I think of the 16-year-old skinny and pimply-faced kid from Kansas who might have told an army recruiter in 1942 - *"I want to take on Hitler. Let me at him!"* Well, he wasn't ready - right - but maybe the recruiter saw a spark. And maybe he began to build that teenager into what the boy hungered to be. And

maybe a few years later, this boy had become a man - and he was one of those young men crowded into a U-boat and storming Omaha beach. Maybe he climbed that hill - where his hunt for Hitler could begin.

What will you do to build yourself up for these times? As that boy from Kansas needed time and seasoning - I'll submit that you need the same. // But I promise you this - you stick close to God now - you decrease your need for worldly comforts, intensify your prayer life, pray more rosaries, rest your head against Christ's heart at holy hours, and get to more weekday masses — I promise you on this graduation day that his supernatural graces will grow powerfully within you. *//// He is the initiator /// you - you are his conquistadors.*

I leave you with just one request: Reclaim lost Catholic territory. We must get on with the business of bringing God and our Catholic faith back into the world. It's a very simple concept: publicly show the world your devotion to God and your sincere allegiance to His pilgrim Church.

Pray the rosary on the walking paths at your state university for everyone to see. Maybe wear your Miraculous Medal outside of your shirt. If you attend a public or state university and find that your Catholic student center is lacking and lukewarm

— then you work to fix it - YOU DO IT. — Volunteer to lead a new ministry, become a lector, lead a bible study — whatever, but you work to get it right. If the chaplain at your university is hesitant or flat-footed at masses in addressing sin or calling you to virtue - speak to him after mass, Ya know maybe - “Hey Father, until you show me courage from behind the ambo, in a certain way you keep me from being courageous. /// hey Father, until you display holiness for me, in a very real way - you restrict me from my own holiness - Father - please - fight for my soul. College life is tough - I need you to fight for me.”

Conquistadors - you *are* today’s vanguard — serious business here — You are the vanguard at the very front of the pack that stands on the shoulders of apostles, Church Doctors, mystics, and yes - those lionhearted men and women who bowed their heads to wear the crown of martyrdom.

You are the spiritual heirlooms of Mrs. Carroll and the faculty here at Seton. It is by your witness that the pendulum begins to swing back. The only true fight left today is for God. *Seton Class of 2022 - Who is better to engage in this spiritual battle than you?. /// Who? /// Who is it?*

No one.

