

Good Morning. I am both honored and humbled to have been asked to speak for this wonderful occasion. I congratulate each of you and your parents on your success today. Your achievements in the values of the Cum Laude Society, those of Arete, Dike, and Time, are being honored here today by your induction into this prestigious society.

You are here today because, over the past four years, you have represented these values in many, if not all, aspects of your life. You have made hundreds of decisions that have embodied the values of Excellence, Justice, and Honor. I want all of you to take a moment and think about what these words mean to you: Excellence, Justice, Honor. What decisions have you made to live these values?

When I hear these words, Excellence, Justice, Honor, it makes me think...wow, that sounds exhausting. I'm getting tired just saying those words. That's a lot to live up to for the rest of us. Do you even sleep at night? In all seriousness though, when I hear these words and think about what the Cum Laude Society stands for, it makes me think of the Gilmour Academy mission. This amazing mission that is rooted in identity, humility, and social justice. Which one of you can say Gilmour's mission statement? You've been a part of this community for four years; those students and families watching, you'll be here for four years, and at a very pivotal time period in your life. I encourage you to read GA's mission, to know it, and to think about how this mission IS shaping your life; how it WILL shape your life. Here it is:

To develop the competence to see and the courage to act in creating a more humane and just society. Let me say it again –

- 1) to develop the competence to see and
- 2) the courage to act
- 3) in creating a more humane and just society.

I want to talk to you today about these three parts of GA's mission.

The competence to see:

What competence is needed to see? What knowledge and skills will you need to acquire?

Speaking to a group of teenagers at the cusp of young adulthood, I will tell you the competence you seek begins with your own self-identity. This is an important first step because your identity is the lens in which you view the rest of the world; it is how you filter information coming in. Those hundreds of decisions you've made over the past four years, they've come to eventually make up your identity – your character – who you believe yourself to be as a person; who you are perceived to be by your family, by your friends, by your teachers, by your community, and by the rest of the world. I want you to think of a word or a phrase right now that describes who you are. It could be who you see yourself as or who you think others perceive you to be. Go ahead; think about it. Now, keep that word or phrase in mind. Write it down somewhere. Look back at it a year from now, five years from now, ten years from now (there's probably an app on your phone that will email or text it to you in those increments).

In a few short months, you are going to leave the small community of Gilmour Academy and your home. You're going to a slightly larger community that is college, and after that you will be out in the world. The average human brain does not stop developing until you are around 25 years old. So, you will experience a lot of progress in your identity between now and then. Over those next 5-7 years, you will make hundreds of more decisions that will form the adult version of your identity, of your character. And that word or phrase you just thought of; the word or phrase that makes up who you are, what you believe in, your identity, your character; it will be challenged; it will be stretched, it will be tested. In those moments, you will have to make a decision about that word or phrase, about who you are. As you learn more about the world and experience more of it outside this comfortable space, you will need to decide: does that word or phrase still define who you are? Does it still represent what you believe in? I can't tell you which choice to make, only that you will need the competence to know yourself when it comes time to decide who you are as a person, the principles you believe in, and what you stand for as a contributing member of society.

The courage to act –

How do you develop the courage to act? How will you know when to act? Speaking specifically to a select, elite group of high school graduates in front of me, and the larger Gilmour community, we must acknowledge we are leading a very privileged life. And what I hope you will soon realize when you leave Gilmour, is that not everyone in this great nation and the world has been blessed with the same opportunities and privileges as all of us. As someone who has spent their professional career working with individuals from communities where justice and privilege have NOT always prevailed, I can tell you this: unless you decide to dedicate part or all of your life helping individuals from these underserved communities, you will never know what they are experiencing. And then, even if you do decide to work with individuals from these communities, you will only come so close to truly understanding the challenges and the obstacles they face in their everyday lives because you, yourself, are not living it. You are still only witnessing it second-hand.

So, what do you do? What do you do when you hear and see all that is going on in our nation and the world. What do you do when you read and hear the news about the injustices that are taking place? There is no doubt in my mind I am speaking to a group of future leaders; leaders who will be in positions of authority and power; authority and power that will give you the privilege of making decisions that impact the lives of others. So, what do you do? You humble yourself. You act like you don't know what you don't know. Let me say that again – act like you don't know what you don't know. Which is very important for a group of individuals such as yourselves – the top of your class, the brightest, the most driven – there is no doubt in my mind all of you are going to do some amazing things; you will be sought after for advice as the experts in your chosen fields; you are going to impact people, society, and the world in all sorts of unimaginable ways. Seek FIRST to understand each situation and each individual you encounter, BEFORE forming your opinion. Offer compassion, empathy, grace. And this – this momentary pause BEFORE the judgement, to consider how someone else feels, how someone

else is experiencing life, to put yourself in their shoes and walk around a bit BEFORE passing judgement – this is how you develop the courage to act.

Creating a more humane and just society –

When you look closely at Gilmour's mission, the end goal is to create a more humane and just society. You need the competence to see and the courage to act in order to achieve this. It's not the competence to see and the courage to act in furthering personal ambitions. It's not the competence to see and the courage to act in gaining power and authority for selfish means. It is in order to create a more humane and just society; it is a purely self-LESS act. In order to do this, you'll need to define what a more humane and just society means to you. What does it sound like? What does it look like? What does it feel like? And for whom is it more humane and just? A certain group of people? All people? People from all walks of life? The Oxford Dictionary defines Social Justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. The United Nations defines it as the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities.

Over the next 5-7 years, when you are making decisions about your field of study and which profession to pursue, I encourage you to consider how this path you go down will lead to a more humane and just society for all humankind; not just a specific group. How will your choice of profession impact the economic, political, and social rights and opportunities of all people?

Excellence...Justice...Honor – are you tired yet?

The competence to see...The courage to act...In order to create a more humane and just society.

So, you have your word or phrase? The one that describes who you are.

What competence will you need? How will you develop the courage to act? How will you make the world more humane and just? And, more importantly, for whom will it be more humane and just?

Congratulations again on your achievement today. Enjoy these last few months at this treasured place and time in your lives; good luck as you transition to your next chapter; you're going to do some amazing things; we are all cheering for you.

Thank you.