

**University of Canberra**  
**GRADUATION SPEECH - Francis Sullivan**

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, faculty deans, parents, friends and colleagues of the graduating class of 2015, and graduates.

Congratulations!

Today is far more than a celebration of your graduation.

It is a public statement by you and the University of Canberra that you have achieved a standard of excellence worthy of the institution.

It is a public marker showing that you are qualified to practice in your chosen field of endeavor as a professional and to bring to your working life all that that implies.

You will by now be well schooled in the technicalities, theories and modalities of your fields of inquiry.

You will have the necessary skill sets to apply to problem solving and the conveyancing of life's challenges.

But can you be trusted with the bigger exercise, the macro project in which we are all engaged?

Basio, a Zen Buddhist once said:

*...I do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the ones of old...*

*I seek the things they sought...*

I put it to you, regardless of your philosophy, religion or personal code, we all seek the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

The very fact that deep within us all there is the need for respect and dignity, tells us that there is a higher summons to treat every person with a respect that comes from the very fact that they are human.

Put plainly, no matter where your public or private life plays out, you are engaged everyday in helping construct the good life.

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You need to be ever watchful that complacency and shallowness, let alone seduction and delusion, don't render you an agent of resistance to the flourishing of that good.

This is important.

It touches on the foundations of a good life.

Being trustworthy means you carry the torch of integrity, speak the language of honesty and live a code of truthfulness.

Very importantly you take this trust into your workplaces and into the cultures of institutions. These days many institutions are struggling to regain the trust of the community.

In my current role I've seen the best and worst of The Catholic Church, which has certainly eroded its credibility with the shameful scandal of the clerical sex abuse of children.

The hypocrisy of the scandal is breath taking.

Yet far too many good people remained silent in the face of cover-ups and deliberate obfuscation and deception.

Church leaders and other professionals remained silent or were too compliant with the system, protecting the image of the church instead of taking the moral course and confronting wrong regardless of the consequences.

So being trusted speaks to the challenge of facing conflict and relying firstly on your own conscience in determining what is right.

It necessarily challenges us all not only to cherish the deeper virtues like compassion and justice, but it asks us to put them into practice.

This places a burden on our shoulders. But it is a load we can carry.

Firstly, we are agents of a future that is not just our own.

Individual aspirations have their place and they contribute to their best effect when in the pursuit of the common good.

Secondly, we are guardians of a code that is based on principles and values that prize human dignity, truthfulness and justice.

Lastly, we are participants in a shared project where fairness, equal opportunity and accessible prosperity for everyone are the touchstones of our desired social order.

This becomes our ethical framework, our litmus test for what is right.

So, as is the tradition at graduations, let me leave you with some hard earned – if slowly absorbed – reflections as you plunge into that big world out there.

Value the imaginative as much – even more – than the rational.

Regardless of your walk in life, in the circumstances in which you might find yourselves, or the duties you will have to perform, being a trusted person and building trusted relationships will do more to create the good life than most other things.

Respond to people honestly, and be reliable in what you value.

Welcome difference and change in yourself and others as part of a normal unfolding of life rather than as an affront to your take on the ways things should be.

Be slow to judge. Do a quick take at the end of each day. Were you too quick to react without thinking?

Be courageous in the face of ridicule, discrimination, deprivation or even extinction. You will live on! And cherish your inner world. It is the font of all wisdom, truth and goodness.

When the time comes for you to have to make a choice between what is right and what is easy – and it will – remember the words of Harper Lee from *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

*...before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience...*

Make the most of your education and the economic security that that affords. Unfortunately there are still too many people who continue to miss out.

As you go out from here, expand your world. Be restless and curious. Be game. Be open. In doing this you will grow, you will gain much, you will contribute –to your families, to your communities, to your country and beyond.

And remember the prophetic words of the prominent American rabbi, Harold Kushner who said:

*No one ever said on their deathbed 'I wish I'd spent more time at the office'.*

Congratulations, great work and well done.