

Remarks
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Gratitude in the Face of Obstacles

“You need to grow up.”

Instead of hearing words of comfort or sympathy while complaining to my friend, I heard the truth: “You need to grow up.” And that phrase changed everything. I learned that while we may never have control over the negative events of our lives, we can control how we respond. Every single one of us in the Class of 2026 can be a builder of our own life. We’ve all faced moments that tested us, academically, personally, and emotionally. Some things didn’t go as planned on the long path to this graduation day, moments where quitting might have felt easier than continuing.

It is such an incredible honor to stand here and speak to the graduating Class of 2026, a class defined by resilience, growth, and perseverance. Today, I want to talk about gratitude, but not in the way we usually think about it. I want to talk about gratitude in the face of challenges. If there’s one thing the Class of 2026 understands, it’s that life is challenging. Over the past four years at Trinity, we’ve endured plenty of obstacles: There’s the ever humorous and dependable loss of Wi-Fi right before an assignment is due, or the too frequent loss of hot water right before you need to take a shower, or forgetting to remove your laundry and finding it on the floor. We’ve also collectively experienced far more serious challenges like international travel insecurities, news headlines of campus violence, political polarization, or financial pressures. And even when someone looks like they’re doing great on the outside, they may be struggling deeply on the inside.

However, everything in our lives—good, bad, or somewhere in between—has shaped who we are today. And that’s what I want to underscore today: The moments we once considered the worst are often the moments we should be most grateful for because they present an opportunity for us to grow. Every loss, setback, or person who did us wrong has the potential to make us stronger than we ever thought possible—if we decide to respond with gratitude. Now, I know, that seems easier said than done. If we have ever lost a loved one, if we were ever bullied, or if something happened that doesn’t seem to ever have the chance of being made whole again, it’s a little tough to just say, hey, be grateful because that will make you stronger. I don’t want to minimize the realities of very tough situations. I do want to acknowledge the pain, while at the same time encourage us to keep going. We shouldn’t let the hardest moments tear us down.

Coach Cosgrove, I’m sensing you shaking your head right now: [Coach Cosgrove Impression] “You should never be grateful to lose.” And fair enough. But Coach, if we hadn’t gone through that stretch last year of losing three out of five games in January, we wouldn’t have won the national championship. That struggle, those painful losses, made us hungrier, tougher, appreciative, and a more complete team. Outside of basketball, I’ve made plenty of mistakes, and numerous things haven’t gone the way I planned. Each and every one of those moments could have stopped me (and I’m not gonna lie, a few of them really slowed me down!), but they shaped me. A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor. We hear these kinds of cliched metaphors all the time, but the real question is whether we’re willing to live by them when life actually gets hard.

And before you ask, yes, we should absolutely be grateful for the good things, too. Tell your family you love them. When you land your dream job, thank the people who helped you get there. When you win, be grateful. And when you see a professor or staff member who made your Trinity experience better, tell them, because they would love to hear it. But it would be a mistake to be grateful only for success because setbacks carry lessons. You learn far more about yourself in moments of struggle than in moments of comfort. True growth often happens when things are hard. We are true Bantams, not the most well recognized or flashy of birds, but one of the toughest! We've got grit! We're not soft like a cardinal 😊. So as the Class of 2026 steps into the next chapter, be grateful for every setback, challenge, and hard moment because those moments are shaping the strongest version of you.

Class of 2026, be grateful for every loss because it's the reason you'll win bigger.