

Daniel J. Cotton
Valedictorian's Speech
May 27, 2010

Dr. Mariano, Mrs. Sadowski, faculty, administration, classmates, families, and friends:
I would like to start by saying a prayer that has had a profound impact on me during my time at Archbishop Williams:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
And wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
As it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
And supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.

Since Theology class my junior year, when I was first introduced to this prayer, it has helped shape my understanding of life. The first four lines have a simple but profound message: seek only to control what can be controlled, and leave all else in God's Hands. I have realized through experience that this message, when put into practice, can help one to achieve great success and find peace of mind by utilizing the attributes of courage, patience, and wisdom.

In academics, I have often found myself feeling stressed over important assignments. When I saw the amount of work that was necessary to earn high marks, I would panic, anxiously thinking about how daunting the task was, and how much time I would have to put into the assignment. But when I sought only to control that which was within my grasp, namely the way I prepared myself and my effort in mastering the material, I was able to ease my mind and focus on the task at hand.

This past hockey season, our coach preached a similar philosophy, constantly urging the team to "control the controllable." That meant only worrying about how attentively we learned team systems, how hard we prepared, and what kind of attitude we brought to the rink each day. We could not allow ourselves to focus on what our opponents did, how referees called the games, or any unlucky breaks that came our way. What mattered was how we used what we could control to respond to these situations.

By following this motto, our team was able to attain far more success than even we thought possible, advancing all the way to the state championship at the TD Garden.

While it's easy to understand how the serenity prayer has impacted both my life and yours during our high school experiences, the years ahead will test our courage, our patience and our wisdom on a much larger scale and upon a much greater stage.

On the largest scale of all, our President has been given the awesome power as Commander in Chief to decide between declaring war and negotiating peace. Interestingly, President Obama has said that the author of the serenity prayer, Reinhold Niebuhr is one of his favorite philosophers. This is no surprise because the decisions of a President must always be based on weighing and understanding what can and cannot be controlled. Luckily he has many advisers to give him the wisdom to know the difference.

But what about us? Courage and patience and the wisdom to know which to use will govern many of our actions and decisions in the years ahead.

Decisions, decisions, decisions. Should we transfer from the college that we have selected because it is too far from home? Or not far enough? Would we be courageous in making such a change, or simply giving in to impatience?

What about our college majors? At some point many of us are sure to say, "Why did I ever choose this as a major?" At that time, should we follow our instincts and change our major.

But what if our feelings are based on fear or other outside influences beyond our control? What if this **IS** the field for us but is a little more difficult than we expected? It is then that we will have to weigh all our options and have the **courage to change** or the **patience to accept** what brought us to this choice in the first place.

We live in a world of intense speed and quick results based on the instant access provided by technology. We want what we want and we want it NOW! But we must not let our first instincts be our only ones.

My advice to you and my desire for all of us in the years ahead is that we consider the alternatives in all of the decisions that we face and in all of the choices that we ultimately make.

In the film *Dead Poet's Society*, the English teacher, Mr. Keating, explains his philosophy, known as carpe diem in this way: "There's a time for daring and a time for caution; a wise man knows what is called for."

My wish is that we all have the courage to change the things that we know we can and that we also know we should. My wish is that we have the patience to accept the limitations that we all must face. My wish is that we have the wisdom to understand that when we put our faith in God, our destiny is truly in our hands!

In closing I would like to thank all those who have supported me and challenged me: faculty members, administration, coaches, my family, and, most of all, my classmates. I wish you all the best of luck in the years to come.