

Father Daniel, administrators, educators, parents, families, friends, and the class of 2020.

There's always a breaking point during a vacation when missing home surpasses the enjoyment of the getaway. When that small ball of loneliness achingly grows and grows until all you can think about is sleeping in your own bed, eating Mom's warm banana bread, and seeing friends and family. The vacation itself brings excitement and new experiences.

However, true joy resides in the bonds between loved ones. The longer these loved ones are separated, the stronger this homesickness becomes.

Being briefly separated from the challenging coursework of school appeared blissful, however only a few days into isolation, I soon realized that Cardinal Gibbons has always been much more to me than a school, it is my second home, and I was very, very homesick. What I wouldn't have given to even visit this second family of peers, educators, and administrators who filled my days with constant reminders of their unconditional love.

When away from home and the ones we love, it seems to be the small things we miss the most. Those things that we take for granted: a home cooked meal,

maybe a goofy dad joke, or even a kind smile from mom. How can such basic interactions carry so much meaning? It's simple -----

to express heartfelt love through action.

This same principle of active love is witnessed every day at Cardinal Gibbons. It's a teacher meeting with me early in the morning, multiple days in a row, it's a classmate helping me catch up on studying after missing a week of school with the flu, it's an administrator reaching out during a stressful exam week.

Like my own family, my Gibbons family shares the love in their hearts by sacrificing their own time and energy to ensure my happiness. This sacrificial, unconditional love is what makes Gibbons inviting and warm, a place of comfort and welcoming, a place where I care about those who care about me, a place that I can call home.

We recognize this love during one of the first official experiences any student will have at Gibbons:

Freshman Welcome Day.

Apprehensive incoming freshmen are pulled out of their cars by exuberant and boisterous upperclassmen. Thrown into the festivities and excitement of the day, these freshmen are not only welcomed into the Gibbons family with open

arms, but they are shown an outstanding example of servant-leadership within their first eight hours at Cardinal Gibbons. These upperclassmen feel a monumental amount of pride and love for their school, so much so that they willingly forfeit their last day of summer vacation and come to school a day early, just to encourage and welcome younger students, not only to their new school, but to their **new family. (emphasize here and pause)**

As an incoming student, Freshman Welcome Day introduced me to the tight-knit bonds not just between students, but between educators, families, and administrators as well. I saw the joyous expressions of educators and students pulling kids from the clutches of their parents, the administrators and students consoling the teary-eyed, empty-nested parents watching their last child enter high school -----

- most importantly, I witnessed trust.
- Trust from administrators that students would not only achieve, but exceed expectations in leading the event,
- trust of families that **we** would care for their children just as much as they do,
- and trust of the incoming students, that we would show them the ropes and properly prepare them to start their high school career.

As I have witnessed within my own home, trust, respect, and sacrifice all prove to be necessary ingredients when forming a loving and supportive family. Freshman welcome day provides not only an exciting and welcoming pathway into high school, it also exemplifies these values through student, educator, administrator, and parent interactions.

Freshman welcome day prepared me for the practical problems of high school:

charge your computer,

be on time to class, and

DO NOT cut the lunch line on cookie Tuesday, (pause)

But the greater gift given to me on that day were the countless examples of a pride in school and a love for others **so intense** (emphasize) that complete strangers would not only give up their last day of summer vacation, but countless hours planning and prepping for 400 incoming freshman whom they did not even know. This type of consistent sacrificial love seen throughout Gibbons on a daily basis set the bar high for the type of person that I wanted to become.

Volunteering at Freshman Welcome Day two years later as a rising Junior, *I* was granted the most grueling duty of any student volunteer. Accompanied by

three other brave souls, we were posted just past the end of the dropoff line; perfectly positioned so that no parent could leave without witnessing the sappy spectacle. We were draped in cheap polyester caps and gowns in almost 90 degree weather. We held a sign reading “in four years.” I believe we Lost count around 50 teary-eyed parents caving into full blown sobs. The four of us soon realized not just how hilariously rewarding this task turned out to be, but also that we only had 2 of these four remaining years left. What feels like only a few short weeks later, here we stand, only days from becoming high school graduates.

These consistent selfless acts of love have made this goodbye even harder. I am not just saying goodbye to a school, but rather a family. It is times like these, times of sorrowful parting, leaving our classmates, teachers, friends and family behind, that are the most difficult to move past. The gospel tonight prompts us to seek joy in the new experiences coming our way, with the knowledge that wherever we may go, and however far we may spread, our greatest joy remains: we will always and forever carry the sacrificial love of Christ within our hearts.

This unconditional love of others makes Gibbons the family that all of us have come to know and love. Each and every day

- I see simple sacrifices made solely out of love for others.

- I see a teacher meeting early in the morning with a struggling student,
- I see a friend going out of their way in the halls to check on a classmate,
- I see a senior give up a spot in the pep rally so that an ambitious freshman has the opportunity to participate,
- I see a student stopping by a teacher's room after school simply to say thank you.

You see, it's not the magnitude of a sacrifice that bonds people together, it's the love behind the sacrifice that gives it meaning.

We are truly blessed to be a part of a school community that prioritizes love and sacrifice to the degree worthy of being called a family. It truly is this love that allows us, the students, teachers, parents, and families of Cardinal Gibbons, to hold a bond so lasting and strong. Cardinal Gibbons will always be a place where we belong, and a family to take pride in.

I would like to thank you all, for giving me the most unforgettable, formative, and incredible past four years, without my Gibbons family, I wouldn't truly be home.