



By Julia Ryan

On behalf of the class of 2017, it is my honor to thank you, Monsignor Shugrue, reverend clergy and religious, members of the Board of trustees and Dr. Fedewa, educators, families and friends for being with us tonight.

I've spent four years planning. I'm a planner. Give me an event and I will make sure every second of it is flawless. As I sat down Wednesday morning, reading the second-by-second plan my mom has crafted for this graduation weekend and emailed to every family member, I realized just how close to the tree the apple falls. I've spent four years meticulously planning and perfecting things at Gibbons. I used to think it was because I saw Gibbons as something great that I could make better and better.

However, Gibbons has taught me that the best things in life are not planned. My very first impression of Gibbons was not freshman welcome day, as it is for most. My first impression was an indirect experience. I was a freshman walking in with no clue what Gibbons was. I had everything planned -- outfits, school supplies, things to say in order to make friends -- but this welcome hit me.

The welcome that I got wasn't even mine. You'd have to ask my dad, an English teacher and basketball coach at Gibbons. Ask him about his very first morning as a Crusader, when a ton of

students pulled an all-nighter at Gibbons to write (and later recite) Shakespearean sonnets about him. Ask him about when they ran across the parking lot at 7am in the middle of their summer break to make sure that he knew how glad they were that he was there. Yes, since he came from teaching at another high school, originally he thought it was a protest march. But then he saw a giant poster that read “But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? // It is the east, and Mr. Ryan is the sun.” He realized that pulling into that parking lot on that morning was the best possible place he could ever be. Hearing this story, I was brimming with gratitude, and it wasn’t even my direct experience. This stuck with me for so long that I made sure to spend the rest of my four years making every new teacher feel as welcome as Mr. Ryan did on that early, August morning.

Those kids, making my family’s first impression of Gibbons incredible, already knew what took me four years to figure out. Sitting on my living room couch, hearing my dad recount his Gibbons welcome, something was planted in me. Something I will never forget. It’s not about the plan; it’s about how you make people feel. *This* is Gibbons. *This* is what made me who I am.

There’s a story in the Gospel of Luke about two women named Martha and Mary. Jesus comes to the village where they live and Martha spends all of her time serving and working on dinner for Jesus, while Mary sits with Jesus and just listens to him speak. Martha gets frustrated because Mary’s not doing any of the work, but Jesus tells Martha that Mary’s had the right idea all along. He says “Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.” Jesus is telling her that spending time with him and spending time with others is most important in our lives. As you can probably surmise, I identify with Martha. I plan. I organize. I work. I serve. I’ve always been Martha. Gibbons taught me to be Mary. Gibbons made me *want*

to be Mary. Gibbons has shown me how insignificant the plan is in comparison to the faith, and the love.

I learned firsthand how significant faith and love are through our senior Kairos retreat. How lucky I was to be able to put my phone away for four days and spend time with my Gibbons community, getting to freely express anything that's weighing on me. I could finally open my eyes to an incredibly strong faith that I didn't even know I had.

How lucky I am to always remember sitting on a folding chair in the middle of the junior locker bay an hour before school started because one thousand people came for daily mass to pray for Matt Hollis and his family: Watching people flood the halls all the way to the lobby. Hugging a girl I'd never spoken to. Singing *On Eagle's Wings* with my classmates -- my family, in that moment.

How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so difficult.

High school is a place for growth. We've grown as students, as disciples in our faith, and as practitioners of our passions – but the growth we feel the most is our growth as people. Hearing about my dad's welcome four years ago, something was planted in me, and I know now what it was: love.

I spent four years planning because of that love. It's not about the pep rally schedule being fit to a T. It's not about having perfect attendance at meetings. It's not about going to a leadership conference to learn to manage people, or to create a better event. It's about seeing how love creates the foundation for every single thing. It's about love. It's about giving back to this place

that has given so much to me. It's not about the plan; it's about how you make people feel. I have felt more love at Cardinal Gibbons High School than any other place on earth. We love each other, and maybe that's why our goodbyes are so difficult now.

So thank you, all of you, for making my goodbye so difficult. But let's push aside the sadness of our goodbyes and the excitement of our future for the time being. For as Saint Mother Teresa said: "be happy in the moment, that's enough." At this moment, we are in absolute bliss. We are all Crusaders of Cardinal Gibbons High School – and it doesn't get any better than that.

Thank you.