Good morning.

*I want to thank President Baldasare for having me here today.*

I want to add my thanks, too, to the faculty and administration of this wonderful University, who have made the fine education that we celebrate today possible. I want to salute the parents and grandparents, the brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins and dear friends who are here to witness this momentous occasion. And, finally, the most important thing I have to say:

CONGRATULATIONS to all you freshly minted graduates of St. Andrews University! Hooray!!! Job well done! You’ve done so much hard work to get to the place where you sit today.

This is a very moving moment for me. I find myself these days in the midst of milestones: our youngest daughter got married two weeks ago today. We will be celebrating my mother-in-law’s 90th birthday next month, in Charlotte. And our older daughter is due to deliver our first grandchild in July.

Equally moving to me is this: I am here, on this beautiful campus, where both of my parents taught. I got to party last night with friends I first made half a century ago, friends with whom I graduated from Laurinburg High School. On this campus, my brother taught me to drive a stick shift, bucking around the parking lot that was then behind the Vardell Building. And it was in that building, by the way, that I took piano lessons. (I became a pretty good driver, but not that much of a pianist.)

So, this is a very powerful place for me. And today is a very powerful moment. I was deeply honored to be invited to give your commencement address, and I wanted very much to find something real and meaningful to say to you. So, amidst all these milestones, I’ve been thinking a lot about life, and how it is shaped, and **what** shapes it. And that’s what I want to talk to you about: The role you play in shaping your life.

In other words, I want to talk to you about LEADING your life. You know, much of the time, life leads YOU. And this is truer now than ever. My field, journalism, has surely shown me that. The constant wealth of information available, whenever and wherever you are, is an addictive distraction. Virtually every field is like journalism, in that change is coming unbelievably quickly – technological change, social change. All our lives, now, are affected by fast-paced change, happening constantly all around us.

It’s easy to get carried along in the rapids.

Now, please don’t mistake me. I am not griping about change, and I don’t fear it. I think this is, for the most part, an enormously promising and hopeful period. This moment, when you are coming of age and launching into adulthood, is a wonderfully interesting one. Along with unsettlement, it offers boundless promise for a better, more just, more richly connected, world.

So when I say I want you to LEAD your life, rather than have it lead you, I don’t for a moment mean that you shouldn’t expect change, or embrace the unknown, that you shouldn’t be open to serendipity, or be light on your feet. The connections that social media allow us are so rich. Today’s entertainment menu is so remarkably fresh and diverse. Sure, we all need to be smart about the *choices* we make. But WHAT a wondrous world this is, one that we should embrace with gusto.

Still, amidst all this stimulation, amidst all of these ways that life is leading US, what I want you to think about – no, what I want you to *commit* to here today -- is this: To establish some goals, to set some parameters, for how you want to lead your life. When YOU look back in fifty years, what do you want to see? When you near the end of your life, what is it that you hope gives you reason to say: “I did that well.”

Certain things in life need attending to. This requires *conscious* decisions. This demands stepping occasionally out of the maelstrom to be MINDFUL about how you are spending your time. It is having goals in mind that keeps your life pointed in the direction you want it to go. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” I think he put it this way – talking specifically about the long arc – in order to acknowledge the many, many injustices along the way, while stressing that what matters is what happens over the broad sweep of time. That is how life works: It is the arc, over the long term, that determines the shape of your life, more even than the dramatic twists and turns that life takes along the way.

Every life has its ups and downs, its tragedies and joys, its obstacles and serendipities. My message is surely not that you can CONTROL your life. But you can shape it. And in order to shape it, (in order to LEAD it), you have to DECIDE where you want it to go. And to keep it headed there, you have to check in with yourself, now and then, to see if you’re living up to your commitment to yourself.

So, let me ask you graduates two things. Can *you* identify *your* priorities? And, if so, are you are in fact investing your time, your energy and your emotions IN those priorities?

Most of us would say that love is a priority. Is it for you? Are you paying attention to those you love? Are you thinking about what your family members need -- or simply would dearly love to *have --* from you? What your friends are hoping for? Are you making powerful commitments to those whom you love most? Loving people well takes time, and energy and thought.

Or, how about your goals as a citizen, a member of society? Do you, for example, hope to make community a central commitment? Are you aiming to do what you can to make this nation more just? To make your local schools better? To make the streets safer?

Or maybe it’s environmental concerns that drive you. Food safety, or climate change; energy self-sufficiency or water scarcity. Whatever your passion as a citizen of this fast-changing world, note it, and commit to it, and check in regularly to see whether you are following through.

Another commitment to consider is keeping your spirit healthy. Are you being true to your faith, whatever it may be? Are you taking time out to pray, or to meditate, to relish the outdoors, or whatever it is that nourishes YOUR spirit and makes you a kinder, more loving person, one who awakens happiness in others through smiles or small courtesies? Do you take time to laugh, to read a poem, to dance?

And how about your physical well-being? Are you eating right, and feeding your loves ones well? Are you exercising, sleeping, avoiding excesses, *caring* for yourself?

And then of course there is your work, an essential part of life in so many ways, and hugely time-consuming. How will you determine if what you are doing is right for you? What kind of contribution do you most want to make? Are you doing the best you can at whatever it is that you have to do?

Your touchstones may be different – no they WILL be different -- from mine. That’s as it should be. But *whatever* they are, your last St. Andrews assignment is to think about what’s important to you. Determine the goals that will enable you to LEAD your life. Write them down. Commit them to memory. And then commit to checking in with yourself regularly to see how you’re doing.

Now, I imagine that, to some of you at least, this may seem unnecessarily prescriptive. You don’t HAVE to do it, of course. Your life will unspool without it. You’ll be happy and sad, you’ll fail and succeed. But in the absence of clear goals and a commitment to head toward them, the arc of your life will be directed more and more by happenstance, determined more and more by other people. There will be a widening divergence between where you had hoped to go – if you had thought about it – and where your unexamined actions are taking you.

You’ve got this one lovely chance to do it right. Why not be the leader in your own life?

Of course there’s no test on this last lesson at your beloved alma mater, no exam to determine how well you’ve done it. Life provides the test. And if you are **conscious** of how you want yours to look, if you are **intentional** about the direction in which you are moving, if you are **mindful** about monitoring how it’s going – well, I promise you this: You’ll end up being amazed at how many of your hopes have been realized.

I am grateful, for so many reasons, to be here with you on this memorable day. And prime among those reasons is this: In crafting my message to you, I have reminded *myself* of what I think is important. Like you, I’m beginning a new stage of life, stepping out on unfamiliar terrain. I’m brand new at not working full-time. Come to think of it: *This is the first day of the rest of my life!* So excuse me while I go figure out what my new markers are, and how I’m going to ensure that my commitments to myself come true. So that when I *really* grow old, I can look back and say: That’s the kind of life I hoped to live.

So, now: Congratulations to you all! And remember: the future IS in your hands!