

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 2009
Presented by: Jose Guerrero

Good afternoon members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, **FAMILIAS** and friends:

(MUY BUENAS TARDES A TODOS)

Today I stand before you with a number of feelings generated by the great honor of being the Lasallian Speaker. I feel, first of all, very nervous. For it is not easy for me to stand in front of thousands of people and try to articulate this message in a congruent and clear manner. Luckily for me, and for _____, I only get a few minutes, so it will be brief.

I also feel very satisfied. Extremely satisfied. For here and now, before you all, I can say with great pride (_____), that today, like many of you, I will be the first member of my entire family to receive a college degree. (_____)

But let me tell you something.

You see, today it is not only me who is graduating. For this degree, even though it physically only bears my name, symbolically it also bears the names of my parents and my entire family, the names of my instructors, the names of my benefactors, and the names of all of those who gave me their support when I most needed it. This is why, over and above my feelings of satisfaction, pride, and nervousness, I feel infinitely thankful to all of them for having helped to make my dreams and dreams of seeing me at my graduation come true here today.

(_____)

I want to tell you about a very important French priest, who many of you have probably heard about, especially those of you who are members of the Lewis University community. And if you haven't, you really should learn about him because he is truly quite an important individual. I will tell you why.

A little more than three and a half centuries ago this Catholic priest set out to help the less privileged part of French society, especially children in poverty. He gave up everything he had for his ideals. He gave it up; his wealth; his social position; his position in the church; and he even struggled against the authorities of his time, all this to make sure that as many people as possible could get a chance to improve their lives through education. This individual was Saint John Baptist de LaSalle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In essence, he is also a founder of Lewis University.

Now more than 350 years later, with Lasallian schools in over eighty countries around the globe, with thousands of lay faculty and staff carrying on the Lasallian tradition of education, with over a million students whose lives have been transformed, the legacy of Saint John Baptist De LaSalle still lives on and is stronger than ever. I, ladies and gentlemen, along with many of you, am living proof of his legacy. Let me tell you why.

I was on the verge of becoming part of the statistics that represent the Hispanic college dropout rate. This was neither due to lack of willingness to keep going nor due to academic inefficiency. Rather, I was about to drop out of Lewis as a result of my family's inability to pay my tuition. Regardless of how hard my family tried to help me, paying for college just became unaffordable for us. Thankfully, many members of the Lewis community, loyal to their commitment to diversity, to an affordable education, and to the service to the poor, were there to lend me a hand.

Some way or another they did what they could to gather the necessary resources to assist me to remain a student at Lewis. This way, following the ideals of Saint John

how the universe and everything in it works. More than academic instructors, they have also been my mentors, friends, and family, which is typical of the Lewis community. I spent countless hours around them not only working on experiments but also listening to their life experiences and advice.

They have, without a doubt, provided me with the means to take my next step in life and in my academic career – I, like many of you, will not only go on to graduate school and continue my education, but will also make an effort to start giving back to the community that has helped me so much in the past four years.

I hope that your experience at Lewis was as life changing for you as mine was for me; and that your education transformed each of you into a better individual.

I want to leave you with the words of Former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela. He once said:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

I ask you to keep these words in mind and encourage all of you to go out there, pursue your dreams and help change the world.