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STU College of Law Commencement Speech

So now I get to my part, where I'd like to talk about my piece of advice for you as graduates.

Father Ted Hesburgh of the University of Notre Dame, the very legendary president of the University of Notre Dame, used to always say a three-word prayer whenever he spoke: "Come Holy Spirit." Come Holy Spirit. And so I ask the Holy Spirit, come Holy Spirit.

I ask the Holy Spirit to come every year at commencement time. I do not write my speech until I know that I've been touched by the Holy Spirit, and I usually wait until the last second. But I actually had three things that occurred within the last week that led me to the advice I'm going to give you.

Those three things were very interesting. Because of the support of our Board, I get to serve on the FC100—the Florida Council of 100—which is the top business and education leaders in the state, serving as an advisory board to the governor, Governor DeSantis. They have phenomenal speakers that come in for their fall and spring conferences.

We just had our spring conference. For example, a couple of years ago, they brought Terry Bradshaw, the famous Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback. Now, why that's important is because I am a Cleveland Browns fan, and I hate the Steelers. But my wife—we're in a mixed marriage—she's a Steelers fan. And she made me go introduce her to Terry Bradshaw. So that happened.

But this speaker at this conference a week ago was Jon Meacham. He is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author and a Presidential Scholar. He just finished his new book *And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle*. He gave the best talk I've ever heard on U.S. presidential history.

He talked about a moment in time in 1864, when it seemed like the Republicans—Abraham Lincoln—would not win a second term. Now why was that important? We were in the midst of the Civil War. That was going to put the Civil War in jeopardy. We were in the midst of breaking down the Republic. So if he lost that election, that would be it.

A political operative came to D.C. and told him, "If you want to win the 1864 election, you must roll back the announcement you made on January 1st, 1863—the Emancipation Proclamation—where Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves." That would be the politically expedient thing to do to win the next election.

And you know what Abraham Lincoln said? No. Because he grew up in a Christian household in a slave state, Kentucky. He was a self-study learner. He learned at home by reading the Bible, reading the Declaration of Independence, and reading the Constitution.

He knew—and his family knew, and his church knew—that slavery is wrong. Luckily, he stood his ground. He won the election. We won the war. The Republic was saved.

[Audience applauding]

The second event was last Saturday. My wife and I were invited by the Greater Miami Chamber and Ken Griffin of Citadel to see a rendition of an event called *The Eyes of the World: D-Day to V-E Day*, put on by American History Unbound and supported by the Griffin Catalyst Fund.

It brings together artists, singers, orchestra, and videos to show the story of that one year—from June 6, when we landed at Normandy, at Omaha Beach for the Americans and Utah Beach—all the way to V-E Day, May 8th, when the Germans surrendered.

What struck me was at the end of the night, they played all the songs of the different services and asked anyone who was related to someone in the military to stand up. My wife got—sorry if I get a little emotional here—my wife got to stand up for my father-in-law, who served in World War II in the Navy. And I thought that was pretty cool.

What really struck me: one of the major divisions that landed at D-Day for the United States lost 80% of their division when it was all said and done. Eighty percent.

If anyone has ever been to Normandy—which I had the honor to do two years ago—it is an impactful event. When you walk those 10,000 crosses of young men and women who sacrificed their lives so that we could be sitting here today enjoying the freedoms of this country, it makes an impact on you.

The red in that flag stands for one thing: the blood spilled so we can live in this wonderful country. Never forget that.

[Applause]

And the last event is that we, in the Catholic Church—and we're an Archdiocesan school; we have a direct tie to the Vatican—named our new pope: Pope Leo XIV.

[Applause]

Two things are very significant to all of us sitting in the audience. The first-ever American-born pope. That's awesome. And number two: Pope Leo XIV is an Augustinian.

If you know the history of St. Thomas University, 1961 founded as Biscayne College in Miami. But actually, we were founded by the Augustinian priests as the first-ever private Catholic college in Havana, Cuba in 1946.

Father Spirale from Philadelphia came and started the Universidad Santo Tomás de Villanueva, and it was an excellent college that served the Cubans for many years. It was one of the first colleges in South America and the islands to serve women.

In 1961, Fidel Castro himself invaded the campus, cut the head off of the Santo Tomás statue, and put the priests up against the wall. Luckily, they escaped. Two weeks later, they came to Miami and asked the Archbishop for land. He gave us this land here in Opa-locka at the time, which became Biscayne College for men.

Then we brought back the name: St. Thomas University.

So, the pope brings us hope. He is the first Augustinian, the first American. And there is hope.

So, my three pieces of advice based on those three stories:

Number one, do what's right. Do what's right. Do not do what's politically expedient. Do not do what's financially expedient. Do not compromise when you know you should not compromise.

And as lawyers—I said this to the undergrads, I said it to the grads, our master's and doctoral students—but it means more today. You are lawyers. You are lawyers. You are at the top of society. You will be leading the country—the leaders of the law.

Do what's right.

Now, I will not stand up here as a hypocrite and just sit here and preach to you. I will confess to you: every time in my life where I compromised or did not follow what I knew was right ended up being a disastrous decision.

Make sure you do what's right. Make sure you don't settle. Make sure you protect those around you. Do what's right.

[Applause]

This next one—when we talk about the sacrifice of all those people from D-Day to V-E Day—you must be willing to sacrifice for the most important things in your life, even if it means laying your life down. For God, for your faith, for your family, or your country.

I worry about that today. We all live such wonderful, comfortable lives. And it's great to be comfortable. But when the moment is called, be willing to sacrifice to maintain and save what is most important in your life.

And lastly, always have hope. Always have hope.

You hear people talk all the time about Gen Z and Millennials—how they're not going to do this, and they're not going to be good for the future. That's all baloney.

There was a vase painted before Socrates' time that they unearthed, and some older guy was complaining about the teenagers and how they're going to ruin society and all this stuff.

No. Because of you—I've seen you start here at orientation. I'm now seeing you graduate here—I have great hope.

I have great hope because I think you are going to be phenomenal leaders for this city, for this state, for this country, and for this world.

So make sure you always keep hope alive.

The Dean talked about a lot of things—about all your accomplishments. Okay, I just want three. I'm a lot simpler. I just want only three. The Dean's going to be tougher on you. She's going to have all kinds of things she wants you to be top at. I just got three.

Number one: I want to be the largest private College of Law in the state of Florida. By next fall, we might be the largest private law school in the state of Florida.

[Audience applauding]

Number two: I want to maintain and keep our number one status in mock trial competitions and the Bedell competition.

So one, two... the third: We will be number one in the July Bar Exam. We will.

So with that—thank you. Congratulations. You are our hope. God bless you all.

Go Bobcats.