

## **New Student Assembly - Remarks by University President Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.**

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On behalf of the entire University community, I want to echo the words of welcome already expressed this afternoon. Welcome to this remarkable place, this good ground. Here, since 1888, wisdom has made a home and God's will has been discovered and done. Welcome to parents and families, welcome and thank you. You are entrusting to us your daughters and sons. For that we are grateful, and for our part we promise to care for them, exercising what Jesuits have called for 5 centuries, *cura personalis*, care for individuals in their uniqueness, approximating, as best we can, God's love and care for each of us.

We are also grateful to you as the first, best teachers of your children. Their education does not begin today. It began 18 or 19 years ago in your homes and out of your hearts. Were that not so, your daughters and sons would not be here today, being welcomed into the most talented and accomplished class in the University's history. The sacred work of teaching that you began so well is now Scranton's to continue.

The hopes and dreams, the values and aspirations that you have instilled and inspired, are the basis upon which the work of this University is grounded. And we want you to be a part of that work. Parents and families are an integral part of the Scranton community. Visit often, walk the Commons and watch what's happening to you daughters and sons. Watch as sharp minds are honed sharper still, as imaginations become more nimble, as hearts open wider and wider, more sensitive to the needs of others. Watch as that happens and know that you have made this privilege possible through selflessness and sacrifice. Watch as that happens and know that the University of Scranton is deeply grateful to you.

We are grateful as well to the Class of 2009. Thank you for accepting the Scranton challenge. You have chosen wisely and well, and you have not opted for an easy course. I trust you know that. You have come to a place that will require the utmost of you. Scranton will challenge your certitudes, question your categories and never allow you to settle for the quick fix or the facile answer. You have already proven too intelligent for that, and our faculty will never let you off the hook. They love their work and the life of the mind, and they've devoted years and years to rigorous research. Their passion for teaching will prove contagious and your contact with them is the heart of the matter. Get to know the faculty well. They are the University's most precious resource. Explore with them life's great mysteries and the universe in all of its complexity. Never again is it likely that you will enjoy such learned and generous company. Seize the opportunity that is now yours at Scranton.

Seize, too, the chance to learn from and grow with one another. Cultivate friends for life. Your common experiences on this campus will forge bonds that can sustain you down all the years ahead. It may be hard to imagine today, just after saying goodbye to high school friends, but it's a good bet that the strangers sitting around you now will some day dance at your wedding and stand as godparents to your children. In fact there's a good chance that your future husband or wife is sitting somewhere in the Byron Center right now. Not that you should rush into things, mind you. Love and friendships can truly grow only in God's good time.

As your time at Scranton, so filled with the potential for goodness begins today, I urge you to commit yourselves to this community; engage fully and start very soon. The seniors who left here in May with lumps in their throats and tears in their eyes would want me to tell you how fast four years fly. Today college may seem to loom in front of you as deserts of vast eternity. But time's winged-chariot will chase you from now until May of 2009.

Make the most of your Scranton time: explore options, delight in diversity, learn from differences, stretch until you squawk, bet large on life, when choosing between the chances, choose the odd: study a language, study it abroad, go on retreat, make the City of Scranton your home while making the world your classroom, paint your face purple and lose your voice cheering for the Royals. When you get it back again, call your parents and thank them for giving you these opportunities. Revel in the richness of relationships and experience real poverty by serving the poor – let that experience break your heart, and discover how we are only truly strong in the broken places. Let Scranton challenge you. I promise that it can and in ways you can't possibly imagine on this August afternoon. Serving as President here is the great privilege of my life, and the best part of that privilege is the opportunity to remind you every chance I get how good you are, how good this place is, and how good we've got it.

Let Scranton's goodness surprise you again and again. Be open to growth and always admit what you don't know. As a wise mentor of mine put it, "college is ultimately a time of change. The major part of that change takes place in you. If the college you go to is any good, it will hit you like a ton of bricks. It will lead you to question every

conclusion you have ever reached. It will lead you to deny a lot of assumptions and remake them." College will remake you.

Here at Scranton, that remaking has a very particular context, a Catholic and Jesuit context. University education in medieval Europe grew out of the heart of the Church, on account of the Church's conviction that we live in a world of grace ready to reveal God's active presence. We are meant to serve God "wittily in the tangle of our minds," and that call to intellectual service compels us to seek understanding across the full range of academic disciplines. Our world is "charged with the grandeur of God," and we are charged with discovering that grandeur in our days and works as a Catholic University, a Catholic University with very specific Jesuit contours.

Almost five centuries ago, a small group of college students lived and studied and prayed and worked together, serving the poor of Paris. That group of friends in the Lord became the Society of Jesus. They were led by a large-souled man, Ignatius Loyola, who had profoundly experienced God's love. Ignatius and generations of Jesuit educators after him want to share that experience and the spiritual and intellectual vision it inspires.

Today, at Scranton, we hand on that vision to you and hope that in your time here you will make it your own. That Ignatian vision is the source of our Scranton pride, the cause of our Scranton passion, and the reason for our Scranton promise. The University of Scranton – students, alumni, faculty and staff – the University of Scranton has made a promise to the world, a promise to labor along with God to make the world more gentle and just. Today that promise is renewed as you join us. St. Ignatius hoped that those informed by his vision and educated in the Jesuit tradition would "go and set the world on fire." His hope is ours today for you. Go and set the world on fire.

As you join this community, we now invite you to symbolize your commitment to the Scranton promise and to one another by lighting a candle and reciting a pledge. Know that you can count on the prayers and support of those who brought you here today and those whom you will meet in the course of your Scranton days. God bless you. God bless Catholic and Jesuit higher education, and God bless the University of Scranton.