

2005 Commencement Remarks, Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J.

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON
COMMENCEMENT REMARKS
REV. SCOTT R. PILARZ, S.J
PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON
MAY 29, 2005**

This is the most delightful and most difficult moment for me as President: delightful for the obvious reason that I have the opportunity to congratulate you and thank you, difficult because your time together and our time with you has come to an end. There is a temptation in this moment to sum it all up. And, that can't be done. Your time here has been too rich, too full, too splendidly diverse to do that. So, I will resist that temptation and instead start and end with expressions of gratitude.

Gratitude, first for our honorary degree recipients: Louis DeNaples, former board chair and forever the University's faithful friend; Sr. Pat Talone, model of mercy and commitment to service; Harry Kraemar, a son of this city and of a Scranton alumnus, a pioneer and innovator in Business; and Jay Parini, an exemplary educator and prolific author. They represent the University's highest ideals and aspirations across a range of experiences and expertise. Together, they have shaped so well our city, our country, our University and our Church.

I want to say a special word of thanks to our speaker, Jay Parini. His words were characteristically well crafted and absolutely appropriate for us. When we invited Dr. Parini to speak, I did not know of his deep and abiding interest in St. Ignatius, or the great Victorian Jesuit poet Hopkins. How very gracious of him to help us recall Loyola's legacy and our responsibility for helping it right a world so much in need of faith and justice. Thank you.

We recall other legacies, other gifts today as well - first and foremost, the gifts of parents, of families, to their children - the gifts of spouses to their husbands or wives. Today belongs as much to them as to our graduates. So much was sacrificed so that we could celebrate today: resources, energies, time – years of working, worrying, wondering and watching. As you watched this ceremony today, I hope your hearts were bursting with pride just as much heart is bursting with gratitude, gratitude for the parents, grandparents, siblings, spouses, and for all those who selflessly contributed to our graduates' success.

I now ask all the graduates to stand and join me in applauding you.

While our graduates were at the University, no group contributed more to their success than the Scranton faculty. They are a precious resource not only for their rigorous scholarship and tremendous teaching ability. They are molders of minds and shapers of souls. In his recent book, *The Art of Teaching*, our speaker Jay Parini writes: *"Teaching at its best is personal. It involves the interaction, even the clashing of separate wills. One can always get mere information from a textbook, so the passing on of facts is the least of a teacher's job. Transforming those facts into feelings is the real work of education."*

No one does that real work as well as the Scranton faculty. To them, as well, our graduates are deeply grateful.

Let me cite another passage from Jay Parini's new work, this one concerning students. Here he is writing about the end of the academic year on a University campus. His campus is in Vermont, but you'll recognize the similarity to Scranton.

"I began to feel this dread coming on in late March, when the spring snows begin to thaw. Huge piles of the stuff grow wet around the edges, melting slowly, so that by the middle of April there are puddles everywhere (sound familiar?). Its called mud season, and it brings with it a certain sloppiness of feeling as well.... It's at this point that I begin to mark the seniors as people who will soon pass from my life, probably forever.... It's never easy to welcome change. It goes against human nature on some basic level.... You meet them as freshmen with their innocent gazes. They look like high school kids, and their eagerness during the first few weeks of class is always touching. Soon enough, they become old hands, learning the shortcuts to a good paper, learning how to skim. They acquire boyfriends and girlfriends, and their confidence begins to swell. This is gratifying, but there is some loss as well. It can be difficult to regain their attention. [Then] in the spring of their senior year, many students become vulnerable again."

Well, my friends, there may be no moment more vulnerable for you than this: good friends about to part day by day ways, one foot raised and ready to step in into the future, the other happy still to be planted firmly in Scranton among

the dearest friends.

As for those friends, my fondest hope is that you will cultivate and keep them. One of the best things any college president told me a quarter century ago was simply this: "Don't waste love." You have been well loved in your years at Scranton. Two years ago members of this class convinced me to come to Scranton by telling me about the closeness of this community. They were absolutely right, and I thank you for the best move I've ever made. Stay that close, grow even closer. Dance at one another's weddings, stand as godparents for each other's kids. As a Jesuit friend of mine is fond of saying, "The conversation will get richer and the jokes will get funnier." The conversation among Scranton friends will be a consolation for you down all the days ahead. Don't waste love.

And don't waste opportunities to come home to Scranton. This is your University now, more fully than it will ever be mine. Come here and walk the Commons, visit with faculty, let them know where your life has led. Stop by my office and tell me how I should be running the place. That's your right, the prerogative of every Royal – and it's also your responsibility. Scranton is yours now. I pray that you will take an active role in shaping the institution that shaped you.

Your time here will determine the contours and content of your lives in ways you can't yet anticipate or appreciate. As T.S. Eliot puts it, "And what you thought you came for is only a shell, a husk of meaning from which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled." Your time at Scranton has prepared you well for purposeful lives pointing toward fulfillment. Today you join generations of women and men stretching back to 1540 formed in the Jesuit tradition of education. Today we entrust that tradition to you, and we do so with high hopes and great confidence that in the words of sacred scripture the good work begun in you here will come to completion.

God bless you, God bless Catholic and Jesuit education, and God bless The University of Scranton.