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Ingenuity Meets the Human Spirit

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Ingenuity Meets the Human Spirit

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Saturday May 8, 2021

By Eric F. Spina

(University of Dayton President Eric Spina praised members of the Class of 2021 for their tenacity, resiliency, and heart at the May 7, 2021, graduate and doctoral ceremony at the University of Dayton Arena.)

Good evening!

Graduates, this is a day for which you have prepared and worked. A day for which you have studied. A day for which you have scratched and clawed and fought. A global pandemic may have changed the way you learned, conducted laboratory research, and completed clinical rotations, but it has not kept you from chasing your dream.

This is a day that sometimes you thought would never arrive. But. Here. We. Are. *This* is your day.

After working so hard for a year or two years or five years or eight years, a day seems like an insignificant length of time, but no...this is a day to be cherished, a day in which every moment should be enjoyed and relished, a day that is to celebrate you and your accomplishments. *This* is an extraordinary day, and I am honored and humbled to be a part of this ceremony with you and your family members, whether here in the UD Arena or across the many miles.

Tonight, as we celebrate your many accomplishments, I pay tribute to your families, particularly your mothers during this special weekend. I know very well that while your academic work has been your own, you could not have attained this advanced degree without the moral and tangible support of others. Graduates, please rise, face your loved ones, and give them a rousing round of applause for their care and concern, their patience, and their love.

Your faculty are with you today in spirit and will forever applaud your accomplishments. I thank our faculty and staff for creating an environment that has allowed you to stretch yourselves academically. Through their caring and devoted mentorship, they have encouraged you to reach high, to dare to be great. They have prepared you to use your education and faith to serve others.

As I prepared today's remarks, I recalled the words of author Yasmin Mogahed, who wrote, "Happiness, sadness, loss, and gain all pass away. What they do to us is what remains."

What they do for us is what remains.

Your presence here today speaks to your tenacity, your resilience — and your heart. And, as you've discovered during this most unusual final year of graduate school, for all that's been lost, *much* has been gained.

First, you learned the important lesson of tenacity. Your class persisted and persevered. One of today's graduates helped the city of Dayton write a strategic plan for developing a sustainable future for the community. Another, mentored by a UDRI researcher, helped develop software to quickly and accurately diagnose COVID-19. As you make your own mark in life, remember the words of the founder of the Marianists, Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, who said, "I am like a brook that makes no effort to overcome obstacles in its way. All the obstacles can do is hold me up for a while, as a brook is held up; but during that time it grows broader and deeper and after a while it overflows the obstruction and flows along again."

Secondly, you tapped into resiliency and improvised in innovative ways. In the Marianist spirit, you quickly realized new times demand new measures. I appreciated the way graduate teaching assistants worked with faculty to move classes to computer screens

and donned masks to teach in socially distanced classrooms. Our religious studies students transitioned and ministered online, spreading faith and building community, one Zoom gathering at a time.

Finally, just a word about your heart. As graduates of our Catholic, Marianist university, you are leaders who serve. My heart swelled with pride when students in the master's of physician assistant practice program volunteered to help Premier Health vaccinate thousands of elderly residents, some of the most vulnerable in our community. You literally saved lives.

I don't have to tell you that graduate school is intense, even in the best of times. It requires a high level of focus and dedication, the traits that mark the greatest musicians, scientists, engineers, teachers, health care professionals, theologians, entrepreneurs, artists, communicators, and business leaders.

Many of you have learned to balance jobs and family responsibilities with the rigors of your programs. It's not easy helping young children adapt to virtual classrooms while you're battling your own Zoom fatigue. Some of you made great personal sacrifices as you traveled halfway around the world to earn your advanced degrees at our university, a university you now call home.

The pandemic radically altered the rituals of higher education, but I'm proud that so many of you published peer-reviewed papers and presented at virtual conferences.

In your class, ingenuity met the human spirit.

Every University of Dayton graduating class has its story to tell. Your story is powerful, poignant, courageous. And how you continue to rise above the times will determine not just your character, but your destiny.

As your president — and as a representative of the UD faculty, staff, vowed religious, Board of Trustees, and all of Flyer Nation — I salute you and your accomplishments.

Congratulations, Class of 2021!

(Photo credit: Larry Burgess)