

**This is the speech written and read by the Class of 2021's Salutatorian, Mia Nguyen
at Graduation on June 7, 2021.**

Good evening family, friends, faculty, and DePaul Catholic's Class of 2021. Thank you for joining us as we reach the end of this chapter of our lives and prepare ourselves to embark on the next one.

First off, I would like to thank my parents, teachers, coaches, and classmates for supporting me throughout my entire academic journey and for shaping me into the person I am today. I would not be standing here without you all and on behalf of the entire graduating class of 2021, I would like to say I am eternally grateful for the love and encouragement we have received over the past four years. The sacrifices made by our parents to provide us with a Catholic education and the dedication of our teachers and coaches to guide us along the way are truly appreciated by us all and we cannot thank you enough for the time and energy you have put into providing us with so many unique opportunities.

Coming into high school, all of our parents and upperclassmen were quick to warn us that our time here would pass us by in the blink of an eye and that we truly needed to cherish every moment we had. Like many of my classmates, I was hesitant to believe there could be any truth laced within those words as my senior year felt as though it was an eternity away. However, four years later standing here in my cap and gown getting ready to leave my high school career behind, I have to admit that every one of them was right. The last four years have been anything but ordinary in regard to a "normal" high school experience, but the adversity we all faced brought us even closer together and I would not have changed a single moment. But where can we even begin?

Starting as a freshman, each and every one of us was eager to find our way and begin to look for the people we eventually call our closest friends. Coming from both large public schools and small private schools, we were definitely all in shock once we got to DePaul as none of us really knew what to expect. Between discovering our passions both in and out of the classroom and trying to navigate through a brand new environment, it was definitely not an easy adjustment for most of us. However, the bonds we formed and the memories we created in the first year of our high school career are some that will never be forgotten. It was just the first chapter of our story.

Moving onto sophomore year, we all finally began to settle into our ways and find comfort within our community at DePaul. We now knew the school like the back of our hands and each found our niches and what we were truly passionate about. Our bonds and relationships grew even stronger as we spent more time together whether it be in our favorite classes or at cardboard city when we stayed up all night just to wake up at the crack of dawn the next morning. Each moment we spent within the halls of our school was a blessing we may have taken for granted as nothing could've prepared us for what we would soon face in our next year.

Then onto our junior year, arguably one of the most important of all. We were so close to the finish line, only a year away from being able to wear our green shirts and black fleeces to distinguish ourselves as the leaders of our school. The college talks began and we were all overwhelmed with the questions of what we wanted to do with our lives and where we wanted to go after our time at DePaul. But of course, as if the stress of college wasn't enough during the most rigorous part of our academic journey, we were faced with a global pandemic halfway through our year. While at first we were all excited about an extra two weeks of spring break and a little getaway from the college talk for a small period of time, none of us were even remotely prepared for the magnitude of change we would be facing. We had to transition from our small, close knit community within the walls of our school to learning at a distance from our rooms over Google Meets and Webex as we lost the rest of junior year. Despite the Zoom fatigue we all suffered from and the confusion and uncertainty regarding what our senior year would hold, we all made it through and dedicated ourselves to being able to be where we are at this moment.

Last but not least, our grand finale and the final chapter of our high school story, our senior year. After four long, hard years of time and dedication to our academics, as well as some minor cases of senioritis, we finally reached the end. From wearing masks all day long to sitting six feet apart and even having to communicate with some of our classmates online, this year was unlike anything we have ever experienced. However, that didn't stop any of us from reaching our biggest goals, getting into our top college choices, and being able to experience senior privileges like wearing our college apparel around the school and eating outside with our friends. It may not have been anything close to normal, but with our incredible staff and their commitment to honor us to the best of their abilities, we were lucky enough to experience milestones we've been waiting for since we entered the building. From senior prank day and our kickball games to our amazing prom, we were blessed with a senior year that will certainly never be forgotten and that will go down in history as one unlike any other. And finally, here we are at the capstone of our career, lucky enough to be sitting here in person as we prepare to graduate and leave behind the legacy of our class.

I can say wholeheartedly that the last four years have allowed our class to grow and mature into a family that is unlike any other school community I have ever seen. I could not have asked for a better group of individuals to call my classmates as every one of us were quick to congratulate and support each other at our highest highs and pick each other up at our lowest lows when it seemed impossible to make it through to the end. After all the smiles, laughter, and even tears at times, we finally made it with countless memories to tell our children one day and an abundance of faith to carry with us through the future. I wish the best of luck to each and every one of you as you prepare for your next journey and cannot wait to see what each of you will accomplish in the future. Congratulations to the class of 2021, we made it!