

**Presidential Charge**  
**Commencement, May 16, 2010**  
**The Thomas More College of Liberal Arts**  
**Dr. William Edmund Fahey**

Be mindful and remember.

I am charged to give you an exhortation; or is it that I am exhorted to give you a charge? In any case, I exhort with this charge: be mindful and remember.

“Remember”... I am struck with this word for like all used words, in its using it lives and is not so much shaped, but shapes the user. “To remember.” “To re-member.” The Gradgrinds will tell you with joyless exactitude that the word is derived from Middle English (remembren); which is derived from Old French (remembrer); which is the oxed-tongued Frank’s pronunciation of the Latin word (rememorari); perhaps Gradgrind will note that it is only with the coming of Christianity that Latin speakers put the “re-“before the “memorari,” but in his derivative study he will have derived all life out the word, and will tell you nothing that opens your sight. More importantly, he *will not* see that the word lives yet anew—it sounds out meaning; it connotes as denotes.

“To re-member,” I submit, may be understood as the act of engrafting one thing to another—as branch to the vine. The self remembers and is united to an idea or to another body or to a community. When we remember *someone* or *thing*, we draw that moment through remembrance to us; or is it that we are drawn back to it?

Remember what your favorite barber, Jayber Crow said—one day *you* will be only memory, and that memory will not be yours; it was never entirely nor permanently in your control... and yet be mindful that you will shape your memories and those of others.

Be mindful and remember.

There will come a day, when you are nodding with sleep and will take the blue book from the shelf, and open it upon its cracked spine and look upon marginalia too honest and too painfully young.

There will come a day, when you will look upon the photograph and see its mystery, and say that it must deceive: for surely *it* has moved back in time, for *you* cannot have aged.

There will come a day, when the basement of your mind will flood and the boxes of souvenirs will need to be moved to higher ground if they are to be saved; and opening the damp cardboard you will find the black tassel and fading hood of gold and crimson.

These days are arriving.

If you do not remember rightly, something will be re-membering you as sure as there is dryness, and dust, and dew.

Now being mindful of membership and recalling your membership, is a hard business. A painful business, perhaps. But this is part of your charge. Perhaps you thought that you could escape college free of charge.

I remember another Spring and my own weeks of anticipation, anxiety, and dread. I too was on that awful threshold—when one moved from being a present participle (a *studens*—one being eager) to having become a perfect passive participle (an *alumnus*—one who has been nourished). Your tense is about to change. That may be the cause of great tension.

Some, I believe all, Seniors—in the dark, quiet cockle of their Springtime—dread this change, for there is great fear over membership and the possible loss of membership. No one desires to be dismembered, after all. But the Beautiful changes and wishes to sunder all things. Seeds must fall away from the plant and be trod, trod, trod until new life ruptures forth.

Will you now fall away? Will you no longer then be a member of this community? Will the community change? We know that giants trod the earth in the past, and that the past is always better than the present. The horror of invincible logic suggests, therefore, that in just a few moments, you will begin your journey into the Land of Giants and that the community—your beloved College—will see the setting sun and fade finally into dust. These are ponderous thoughts. Did you think that education was all cappuccino and conversation under a feathery sky?

Perhaps like Scipio you have been lifted in a swoon and have looked upon the ruins of Carthage and said to yourself, “Self—this too will be my community.” (The golden age of Chicester will have come to an end; the iron age of Pia will begin). Memory and the thought of remembering will become awful, if not impossible.

Your own monuments will be toppled, your JP performances forgotten, your senior theses consigned to oblivion. Like the Etruscan poets, “you strove to leave some[thing of worth] behind/Like a fresh track across a field of snow,/ Not reckoning that all could melt and go.”

Like Scipio, perhaps with Scipio, you have learned a part of the truth: all earthly cities perish; all earthly membership dissolves—unless there is something unearthly about it. Sometimes, like Carthage, a community’s arteries harden and in unimaginative sloth, it chokes to death on the fat of its own opulence. Sometimes, like Athens, divisiveness and the failure of leadership leave behind only “the foster child of silence and slow time,” and a cold pastoral for poets and philosophers. But you are not citizens of Carthage or Athens. No, *you* have traveled to Rome and not as “pilgrims of defeat.” You asked and you answer with Wilbur:

What city is eternal  
But that which prints itself within the groping head  
Out of the blue unbroken reveries  
Of the building dead?

What is our praise or pride  
But to imagine excellence, and try to make it?”

Your membership is to a different city. Let no one say of it, as with Carthage—*delenda est*. Let it not become in your mind cold Periclean marble. Let it live on in the actions that you will take and in the excellence for which you strive. But be mindful with Augustine of the true secret of *Roma aeterna*. Proud men, he tells us, pursue “the goods of the body or of their own minds—or sometimes both.” And this—to say the least—does not lead to an enduring city. Be mindful of the mark of true citizenship: that you are not dominated by pride, but that you turn always from yourself to the grandeur in this world, and then the reflection of the light incarnate, and then to the Light itself.

This is the city that nourished you: the City of the true, the good, and the beautiful. Your membership and loyalty are secured by and through those three great attributes—attributes of the city and of its Sovereign King.

And so memories will be healed and made even more wholesome than ever because of your membership and through your re-remembering. So let fear now pass. Your Junior Project performances were not for naught. They shape permanently all subsequent JPs and are absorbed into a greater memory. So it is with all your actions—the noblest of which endure because they participate in something far grander than you may have imagined.

Who conceived of this farmstead and first broke the turf; who planted our maples, who cultivated that old apple tree? Some things, of course, are truly lost, but the memory of old Colonel Blanchard has indelibly shaped your memory for you will always remember these parts of our campus. So it is with your contributions. They will be truly lost, but somehow remembered by those who will follow.

As you go forth into the Land of Giants, you will meet other citizen-pilgrims: remember us to them, for you are now to be ambassadors. Ambassadors of remembering (re-remembering)—you will glide forward in time and meet citizens from the past. Bring them hope and good news and renew their own remembrance. Increase the memory of things.

And I hope that you will journey back to this old place at some point in the future. Be mindful of the fact that we will remember you. Do not let our remembering diminish.

Finally, remember with Augustine that “in the Heavenly City, man’s only wisdom is the devotion which rightly worships the true God, and looks for its reward in the fellowship of the holy ones, not only holy men but also angels.”

Love calls us to the Things of this world; it is very true. And what is Love? What is its source? What brings us back to wonder? Or have I got the interrogatives wrong? Shall I not more honestly pursue my answer by asking Who? Who is love; who is the source; who brings us back to wonder? These questions have a single answer.

Let such questions prompt your remembering. Let it prompt your prayers.

It is a golden day. But the sun has past its zenith, and it is getting late; you have already crossed the threshold.

God Bless you, seniors.

Now, you are alumni.

Be mindful and remember.