

Baccalaureate 2013

I am honored to speak on this occasion on behalf of my faculty colleagues. For seniors to ask for one of us as the speaker at this moment honors us all. Thank you for that.

Here we all are together for a last time inside. Tomorrow morning we will be outside with a 14,000-foot mountain towering over us. Thinking toward that scene I chose the reading Candace just shared with you, a reading about being inside-out, about how the grandeur of the natural world, especially of mountains, makes us think about our interior selves. Augustine of Hippo, the last great intellectual of classical antiquity, was perhaps remembering the Alps, toward which he had looked out from his sojourn in the north of Italy, when he wrote this passage. Likelier he meant the Atlas range of his African home, not so lofty as Pikes Peak. A thousand years after Augustine wrote the passage we have just heard in his *Confessions*, the Italian humanist Petrarch climbed another smaller-than-Pikes-Peak mountain in the Savoy, in the southeast of France, and pulled a pocket-sized copy of the great African's book out of his knapsack. According to a letter he wrote that evening to a beloved teacher, Petrarch by pure chance opened the volume to Augustine's very passage about mountains, on human awe over natural grandeur. So we today, like Petrarch, pull that little book out of our jeans pockets--Candace and I did that for you--and look again at Augustine's thoughts on nature, human memory, and the place of education in fusing them.

People go to admire the high mountains and all the beauty of the universe, the African says. And then they forget themselves. I don't think that is true anymore, do you? In our culture, in twenty-first-century culture, you seniors' culture, time in the mountains is time discovering yourself, expanding your possibilities, dissolving yourself into nature, going into the wild. Ancient and Renaissance people weren't so

Augustine and Petrarch were both interested in how all that works and what we should value in it, especially about the role of the liberal arts in our appreciation of an outside world that we can bring inside ourselves. The metaphor they used to characterize that interior embrace is here around us this afternoon, quite literally. Augustine talked about *a ae e ae*, the halls of memory. When he used the term he was thinking about such great basilican showplaces of Roman imperial power as were familiar in Italy, where he had been, and in Africa, where he was, or in far-away Judea, which he imagined. This chapel, Shove, refers to those structures. It is smaller and it is decorated differently, but like the late antique basilicas whose bones still ring the Mediterranean, it has a grand central nave and narrower side-aisles. The whole points toward an apse, a head, the place where our attention is directed as we enter from the back, as we just did. At first the emperor would stand in the apse, on a dais, to be hailed by his subjects, and there in later Christian times the divine would seem to touch earth on an altar of sacrifice. The basilican form dominated the (r) -1 (r) 1 272.71(i) 2

again in Shove for memorial services. So this is a joyful space, a space of artistic challenge, and space of mourning all at the same time. These layers of signification make it most of all a ritual space. It calls us to think behind the surfaces of the times at which we gather here both to those moments' transcendent meaning and to the

education in which teachers and students are centered, in which knowledge is important in itself, but in which the central goal is the human reception of that knowledge. But we learn too that that this specific historical tradition opens itself to a wider world, as the aisle windows tell—that this kind of education reaches out to many other traditions filled with variety and difference, what we today would call a diverse and global context.

Now, that is the schoolbook tour of this building. I have left out the great rose window behind me, but before we get there let us look down, at the stone itself, how it lies here in what used to be high prairie. Shove's plan, its architectural footprint, is cruciform. It alludes to the cross as the primary symbol of European belief for many centuries, but beyond that it is a virtually human form. It has arms and a head, so represents a human body on the earth. It suggests like Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian man that the proportions of a man or woman's body are beautiful as the natural world's are. They resolve into the geometric precisions of circles and squares in mathematical ratios of body to head, of arms to body. These simple relationships are the same as musical harmonies. And as people from long before Augustine to well after Petrarch believed, harmonies moved the very stars. So this building mirrors both heaven and the human self, purporting their essential likeness. Today those of us using this lectern are miked, but you will find if you stand here—and I wonder if you have done this—and, hoping you are alone in the building because it is kind of

Jesus again appears as the central image, as teacher. Around him this rose window actually has ten petals, and the reason for that is that the great medieval disciplines of theology, medicine, and law—the graduate faculties of the first medieval university, Paris, still important studies—are added in here to what was studied in the liberal arts faculty. Theology is at the top, with medicine on her right and law on her left. Some of you will go on to study medicine or law—I am guessing fewer will do theology, But then following around from two o'clock the same ancient and venerable

