

Thank you, Father Jenkins. To you, to Father Ted, to the trustees, faculty, family members and friends: and mostly to the class of 2010, thank you for having me, thank you for allowing me to be a part of your graduation, and its great to be back in South Bend. My late, great friend Tim Russert called Notre Dame's commencement: the Catholic Super Bowl.

Thank you SO much for the honorary degree you have bestowed upon me. Because I AM an Irish Catholic, I have an instinctive need to begin with a confession, and an obvious one: I don't have a degree of any kind. Not since Mater Dei High School. Confession is a great part of growing up Catholic. Or not. Confession is a little bit like driving in Manhattan. It fills you with anxiety -- you gotta be ready for it -- you have to wait for the lights -- but when it's over, you feel much better. Of course I'm old, so I'm used to the old-school confessional style. Dark wood trim, the light over the door wired to the kneeler, (and I always found it vaguely disconcerting that anything in a confessional had electric current running through it) you stand in line, go over your sins, you go in, bless me father, and wait to see what you get: the package of penance he's going to suggest. My late mother was VERY old school -- when Monsignor Bullman at our Church, St. Mary's -- when he would look through the screen at her, she'd forget everything she was going to say. She didn't like priests who peeked -- and so for years toward the end of her life, even though we lived at the Jersey Shore, she would get on a train, the NJ Transit Jersey Shore Line -- and take it into Penn Station in New York -- she would walk through that exquisite sea of humanity, she'd walk outside and around the corner to a small Catholic Church on 31st Street in New York where they didn't peek and all kinds of people had MUCH more impressive sins than my Mother -- she would go to confession -- as she put it, "because no one knows me there," and get right back on the train to go home to Jersey. It did always make me wonder: WHAT my Mom was confessing? Was it POSSIBLE she was in the mob without us knowing it? Was she in the Gambino crime family?

This is a big day. For you and to a lesser extent for me. This makes me a Domer. Maybe get my picture in the dogbook. The truth is I couldn't pass the swim test. And I don't drink so the Backer is out of the question. And don't MAKE me sing "Oh What a Night"...but I want to be clear: if challenged, I CAN hit that "Oh What a Night" note. Also I've been married for 23 years -- my wife Jane is here with me today -- so that makes me ineligible to attend an SYR.

I am acutely aware that the last person to stand in this position was the President of the United States, and that 8 U.S. Presidents have received the honor I receive today. Previous commencement speakers included General Sherman, Henry Cabot Lodge, Earl Warren, Pierre Trudeau, and TOM BROKAW. Jimmy Carter chose this event to declare the Soviet Union a "diminished threat" to the United States. THIS... was the first major speech Ronald Reagan delivered after the attempt on his life. And by comparison, given my staggeringly modest background and accomplishments, I was understandably concerned about how I would be received. And then I read the Observer. Under the headline, "Seniors pleased with selection of NBC anchor Brian Williams", I read that Senior Nicholas Dan said that while he was, quote, "initially disappointed at not having a

speaker with the gravitas of the President of the United States," Nick said, quote, "When the commencement speaker was first announced, I was fairly unimpressed," but he added: "I'm glad there is no drama about this year's speaker." One senior expressed her preference, instead, for Alec Baldwin, Tina Fey or Amy Poehler. For the record: I'd love to hear them, too. That I get. Also for the record, I got the strong sense students weren't expecting as LOFTY a speech as they would get from, say, a President of the United States -- and meshes nicely with my plan for today. But of all those quoted in the article, a senior named Keith Ruehlmann stood out. The paper says that while some Notre Dame Seniors said they are not devotees of any nightly news program, Keith Ruehlmann said he, quote, knew of Williams from his appearances on 30 Rock and the Daily Show. Said Keith, "I liked him on 30 Rock, so I approve." Said Keith further, "I imagine it'll be the same 'go out and change the world, you are the future' talk...but I'm looking forward to hearing what he has to say." Thanks, Keith, for stomping on my theme. Keith Ruehlmann, killer of dreams.

Here is one difference: ladies and gentlemen, members of the class of 2010, I feel such great urgency as I stand here. And if anyone years from now cares to read these words, perhaps as a measure of our times in the year 2010, they should know this, as you do: as we speak, there are 4-million gallons of crude oil in the Gulf of Mexico. Oil is pouring, billowing into the Gulf of Mexico. As I stand here, there is nothing to stop it. Nothing. They've asked the public for ideas. We've run up against the science. THAT is why there is urgency in my voice. It's a crisis, and I fear it's a metaphor. And the ultimate cruelty, the ultimate perversion is WHERE it's happening. One of the most beautiful places on earth. It's populated by some of the best people on earth. Katrina was an act of God. But this one's on us. And the people of the State of Louisiana don't deserve this. They didn't deserve the benign neglect that turned fatal five years ago...that split apart families and almost took down that city so badly broken. As those of you from that area know: they came back. They climbed back. When the waters receded they woke up and they formed a first line and a second line -- and there were more where that came from. They worked and they sang and made music and cooked good food and they kept on. And now this, and this is because we are addicted to that brown liquid that comes out of the ground. Just as we are addicted to the black chunks that come from deep in the ground in places like West Virginia. Harvesting those black chunks and the brown liquid is noble work and it feeds families and educates children. And in southern Louisiana the oil platform workers and shrimpers are often living next door, sometimes in the same families, sometimes the same person. They both satisfy a hunger -- and one of those hungers brings with it a huge cost. It has turned toxic; it now threatens a way of life. We are staring at a slow-motion environmental disaster -- it will destroy one of the richest wetland estuaries on the planet and my urgency is because of my certainty that this institution -- this graduating class has the brainpower to fix it. And now, you've just been asked.

The last time this ceremony was held in this great place -- this cathedral of football -- this wonderful stadium -- was the year I was born, 1959, during the Presidency of Dwight David Eisenhower. Family and

friends who attended the 1959 commencement had a choice of travel: they could come here by car, by train and by jet airplane. Today, in 2010, all three of those travel at the same speed they did in 1959. We've progressed by leaps and bounds, and yet we're not going any faster. We haven't decided, we haven't dedicated ourselves to doing those things better. And yes, there ARE great differences. That car ride to South Bend is less likely to kill you. Cars are safer, and now a person's voice inside the dashboard will guide you here. In 1959 we called that voice a SPOUSE. On the train if you're lucky you'll have wireless internet. Presumably you could use your ipad. It has spectacular graphics. On it, once you charge it up and download a book on it, it allows you to electronically turn a page -- and its almost spooky how much its like...turning an ACTUAL page. The kind that books have. On planes there have been huge changes since 59. Food has gone away, but there are new things. Things you wouldn't have seen in 59 like sweat-wear, massive wheeled vehicles called carry-on suitcases, and hugely aromatic meals from modern food courts which, once opened, create their own atmosphere for the duration of the flight. But they're not flying any faster. And many of the roads we built in '59 -- President Eisenhower's vision -- that ribbon of highway they sang about, the envy of the world: many of them just sit there. They could use fixing and rebuilding. So could we. When did we stop trying? 60-million Americans are obese. We have a 17-percent poverty rate. We've fallen to 9th in global rankings of prosperity. One of the great things we did -- really without breaking a sweat, bordered on arrogance it was so good. President Kennedy, speaking at a college, Rice University, said: we're going to the moon. He said it in 1962, he gave a time limit of the end of the decade, and we were standing on the moon by the summer of 1969. We forget that sometimes. We're about to END the manned space flight program. It MIGHT come back. We NEED to. We patriots -- and I'm not talking here about TV patriots whose belief is that if you say it loudly and often you love your country more than others do -- I'm talking about those of us who wake up every day and love our country and believe its the best idea on earth -- we SEE the problem and we want to get better. This involves you. And something else involves you: we need better Catholics. In life, I've lost a mother, a brother and a sister. In each instance I found great comfort and solace in my church. I've travelled the world, and sadly that often means I've walked through great destruction -- I've seen staggering loss, both natural and man-made, from Baghdad to Banda Aceh to Port au Prince to New Orleans. And where I have come across people suffering and dying, I have also found Catholic Charities, right there, standing alongside me -- ministering and soothing, helping and healing without regard to self. Every one a shining, towering example of sacrifice and selflessness. Let's make THAT what people think of when they think of the Catholic Church in America and around the world.

Your class has come of age at a moment of great consequence for our nation and the world... a rare inflection point in history. Those last words aren't mine. That's what the President told the class of '09. He was right. He still is. The problem is: our problems have grown even more acute, more severe and more urgent since he stood at this lectern and spoke those very words. That class is out in the world. Next, the world needs THIS class and all the energy and brainpower and enthusiasm and love and faith and soul you can offer. We

need you right now. There is a solution to each of our nation's challenges in each of YOU. I have ONE very special privilege in my job -- and that is: I get to travel, regularly to Iraq and Afghanistan. And let me tell you about the people exactly your age who are over there in uniform. You can bet that some of them are in a firefight somewhere, right now. They're thinking of home and family and girlfriends and the car they're going to buy when they get out. But mostly they're thinking of what they're fighting for and whom they are fighting with. Most of them would love to have what you're getting conferred upon you today, but for whatever reason they chose a different direction and they volunteered for this duty. Their duty is noble and you would be so impressed to see them the way I get to see them. So let's thank them this way: will all the U.S. military veterans with us here today please rise.

I'll leave you with this: my list of things that are great. My gift to you on your graduation day. Things that are great: Thing One: hearing a song for the first time that stops you cold. You're out somewhere and you hear it and it just stops you -- and you're convinced for that moment that it might be the greatest thing you've ever heard to date, and it has the power to change your life. Thing Two is related: Seeing the one you love in a completely ordinary, random moment that you find beautiful and crystalline and epic. And it reminds you why you love them -- because of what's inside them. And trust me when I tell you this: the thing that happens with music happens with love -- believe in love at first sight...it's as real as anything else in this life. Thing Three is the day when we don't have to mention the word "first" in conjunction with Barack Obama or Katie Washington...or a host of other accomplished citizens of this nation. Thing four is Regis Philbin, in any form. Thing Five is being FROM somewhere -- being part of something larger than yourself. Its part of how we identify ourselves and it's a powerful thing. As of today you went to Notre Dame. In my experience -- and I've been around the world a lot and I sit next to untold millions of people on airplanes -- and sooner or later you find out. Either you get to the gate and their cell phone rings and the ring tone is the fight song -- or they hunch forward to get their carry-on and it says Notre Dame on the waistband of their shorts -- there's a sign, you just have to know where to look. And when you talk to them, they find some way to tell you. I have envied these people ever since the day it became apparent to me that I would NOT be attending a great place like this. These people don't say "back in college". They say, "back when I was at Notre Dame." Today you become one of them. Take in the bells as they play the Alma Mater. Come back and visit Touchdown Jesus and bring your kids to the Grotto, buy 'em a Quarter Dog. And tell them you didn't go to college; instead you went to Notre Dame. Good luck, God Bless you, and thank you ever so much for having me here.