



TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN

Commencement

January 24, 2015

Bard College/ Eastern Correctional Institution

My fellow college graduates, congratulations!

Are we ever proud of you!

Dr. Leon Botstein, Max Kenner, professors, staff of Bard College, congratulations to you as well. You talk about an example of daring, innovative educational initiatives! You are a sterling example for all of us, and, thanks for that.

Superintendent Lee and Acting Commissioner Annuci, and other officials from the State Department of Corrections, and staff here at Eastern Correctional, hats off to you for the cooperation and support so obviously necessary for this extraordinary educational endeavor to succeed.

It's a day of rejoicing for all of us -- family, friends, Bard College, Eastern Correctional, the whole community ... but a moment of rejoicing and accomplishment especially for our graduates, and it's to you I want especially to address a few words.

Gentlemen, graduates, alumni, as proud as we are of your degree, of the initials behind your name, we are even more proud of the person who is to receive the diploma, the name before the initials, B.A.

I salute you this graduation morning because you have learned not only the lessons of books, library, classroom, and professors, but the most sublime lesson of them all: that *the essence of life, the core of living, is found within the human person, not without.*

The *within* vs. the *without*

The *inside* vs. the *outside*

The *substance* vs. the *superficial*

The *interior* vs. the *exterior*

Yes, graduates, you know from the "school of hard knocks" and from the excellent college education you have just bravely completed here that there is a tension, a tug – of – war in life between the *within* and the *without*.

Inside is the mind, the heart, the soul; in our *interior life* we locate reason, thinking, loving; we find character, value and virtue; and we nurture, strengthen, and develop this *interior life* by study, reasoning, solid reading, questioning, wondering, education, and, for those of us who dare to call ourselves believers, *prayer*, for the Lord has told us He dwells *within* the heart and soul of the believer.

Outside ... not as substantial, for “out-there” tends to emphasize the superficial over the substantial; urges rather than values; impulsive decisions, not thoughtful, rational discernment; the immediate over the lasting; the passing rather than the eternal.

You, my brother college graduates, have chosen the *interior* over the *exterior*, the *within* rather than the *without*, thus assuring us that you have gained not only some *knowledge*, but also a lot of *wisdom*.

This victory of the *inside* over the *outside* is worth celebrating for any college alumnus, but with you, gentlemen, it is nothing less than heroic.

Because you have the terribly strong *temptation* – - because of your past, because of your errors, because of your record, because so many have told you that you are losers and huge disappointments, and because you are locked up, – - you gentlemen have the strong pressure to ignore the reality, depth, value, dare and dream of the *interior life*, and let the urges, impulses, grievances, and presumed determinism of the *exterior life* dominate you.

To that temptation you graduates have replied, *no!*

To those who think that human fate is determined, that a change in life’s direction is impossible, that a situation like a prison, that can lead to hopelessness and further degradation, that such a plight makes intellectual growth, a search for wisdom, a desire to improve, and a cultivation of the life *within* impossible, I say, “Let them come to Eastern Correctional! Let them see Bard College at work in these walls!”

Yes, we celebrate your graduation! But what we *really* toast is the triumph of the:

within over the *without*,

reason over *impulse*

the *soul* over the *body*

hope over *despair*

mind over *matter*

the human spirit over the law of the jungle.

And for that, graduates, I say, *congratulations*. . . and *thank you*, because not only do you here inside need to learn that, but so do all of us outside. God bless you!