



## Commencement Speech

Dr. Brian McGee, President, Quincy University  
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Friars, priests, parents, family, friends, honored guests, graduates, in the 164<sup>th</sup> year of this great Catholic and Franciscan university, and on behalf of the Quincy University Board of Trustees and the faculty, staff, and administration of the University, I welcome you again to these Winter Commencement exercises honoring the Class of 2024.

To our students, faculty, and staff, I know you've heard from me frequently over the years, in speeches, in emails, and in repeated reminders that every day is a great day to be a Hawk.

For the graduates, this is my last chance to address you as students, as opposed to alumni. I hope you will be patient with me. And, yes, I know that no one loves a long commencement address, so I will be brief.

At hundreds of graduation ceremonies throughout the country, commencement speakers frequently will celebrate all that graduates have learned, including their preparation to become life-long learners, in the great tradition of the liberal arts. Other commencement speakers will focus on those qualities that allow graduates to succeed in life, including integrity, determination, resilience, humility, and hard work.

I'd like to take a slightly different approach. I'll be focused on a very important question: the question of your future happiness.

Today's commencement theme, Hawks, is joy.

Over the course of your life, you will have many successes. You will earn that success thanks to lessons learned throughout your lives, including the lessons you learned at Quincy University.

But success, by itself, will not make you happy. Indeed, many successful people throughout history have been deeply unhappy.

Why? They have focused not on what they had achieved, but on the achievements of others.

There is a now-famous saying, whose author is unknown, though the saying is often incorrectly attributed to Theodore Roosevelt or C.S. Lewis. That saying? "Comparison is the thief of joy."

Some version of this saying – comparison is the thief of joy -- has been in circulation for at least 35 years, because it speaks to a fundamental human condition. No matter how much we have accomplished, someone else will always accomplish more.

- If you achieve something at an early age, someone even younger will come along and accomplish the same thing.
- No matter how many college degrees you earn, someone will always have more degrees than you do.
- If you win a championship or competition, someone else will win two.
- No matter how much money you earn, someone else will make more – unless your name is Elon Musk.

I agree that we sometimes measure our achievements by seeing what others have done or are doing. In the end, though, the abilities, the hard work, the good fortune, and the dedication of others are not variables you can control. What you can control is how hard you will work, what sacrifices you will make, in order to achieve your goals.

In the end, joy will come when we recognize when we have done our best, without comparing ourselves to others. In the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, joy is particularly likely when we combine hard work and humility, knowing that all we can do is our best in serving one another.

For those of us who are Catholic or some other variety of Christian, I suggest we remember the counsel of St. Paul, writing in I Corinthians, when he advised us, if imitating anyone, if comparing ourselves to anyone, to imitate Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't focus on collecting honors, or degrees, or material possessions, or a long life. The life of Christ was a life of humble sacrifice.

So, Hawks, do not let comparison be the thief of joy. Be joyful when you get a job; or a promotion; or marry; or have a child; or become a priest, sister, or brother; or move into a new home; or win a prize or award. Don't let your joy be stolen by comparing yourself to others. Instead, be humble, knowing that you should judge your accomplishments based on how fully you have achieved your own potential.

Have a great day, Hawks. Enjoy your accomplishments. And be joyful, knowing that every day in your future, even the hardest of days, will be a great day to be a Hawk.