The Class of 2011 ... **this evening is the beginning of the end for you.** No, not the end of the world – supposedly that will start tomorrow night with a global earthquake, or so says a caravan of self-proclaimed prophets who calculated when the final judgment will take place and claim the Bible guarantees their prediction. (You can let me know on Sunday how that worked out.)

No, tonight marks the beginning of the end of your days as students. Tomorrow you will become alumni. So that leads me to ask just one question: **WAS IT WORTH IT?** The endless hours spent in the library or the lab, the up and down cycle of wins and losses in athletics, the nights long repetition of rehearsals, putting up with your roommate or suite mate or resident advisor, and all the other stuff that you endured for the past four years (or five or six) – was it all worth it? (Well ...?)

Perhaps you think you can’t answer that question just yet. Fair enough. But these days, there are a lot of scholarly folks out there who have not hesitated to answer it for you. And in their view, the answer is a resounding “no” – a college degree is no longer worth it.

**Some say “no” based on academic reasons.** From their analysis of collegiate learning assessment, you have made “exceedingly small or empirically nonexistent” gains in educational skills.¹ And they are quick to point out that the United States now has the highest college-dropout rate in the industrialized world.² But obviously no one here has dropped out; in fact, you’ve passed the test and are now dressed for success!

Even so, **others will tell you “no” (it’s not worth it) based on economic reasons.** They compare the collegiate experience these days to the speculative housing frenzy that led our country into its current economic crisis – with similarly hyper-inflated prices, investments funded largely by debt, and widespread belief that it will lead to increasing returns.³ And they note that student loans are now approaching the trillion dollar mark, thereby outrace credit card debt as a drain on your personal and our national economy.⁴ Some have even gone so far as to sponsor a fellowship program that pays young people **not** to go to college for a couple of years⁵ ..., fortunately, you’re too late for that!

So, let me ask again ... was it worth it? (Ah, not such an enthusiastic response this time?)

Actually, here at DSU **we think the answer is absolutely “yes”** ... and not just because the alternative of being uneducated is worse or because your years here keep all of us employed! We think the answer is “yes” **because we have a very different sense of worth**, one more in keeping with the truths of Sacred Scripture that you chose for this liturgy and one that follows from the Salesian spirituality that lies at the heart of our educational mission.
If we take our cue from St. Paul in tonight’s second reading, then there’s a big difference in worth between the works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit. If your time here in Center Valley was all about “rivalry, jealousy ... factions ... drinking bouts ... and the like” ... well, in that case, you spent a lot of time, energy and money on things that simply do not last, things that are incapable of being worth much.

But if, instead, you found out how to be joyful, kind, generous, humble and gentle, or any of the other works of the Spirit, then you’ve learned a new way of life, one that begins for you in a new way this weekend (which is why we call it “commencement,” not graduation). Is this kind of life worth it? That should be an easy one to answer!

But don’t just take my word for it. Listen again to the gospel. There Jesus makes the distinction between the ways of this world and the glory of following Him. While the world may hate those who follow God’s word – it did then and it still does – Jesus boldly proclaims the worth of those who do so. In his prayer for his disciples, Jesus states that they are His, and everything of His is God’s. So there’s your real worth, as followers of God doing the works of the Spirit. Equipped with that knowledge, you can always have hope, because belonging to God means that there is no evil in this world that can ever ultimately harm you.

Now, if we’ve helped you to understand this, in even a small way, then you’ve begun to learn the most valuable lesson there is. It’s the lesson of Christian Humanism. It’s what St. Francis de Sales intended by his poetic proclamation that “man is the perfection of the universe / mind, the perfection of man / love, the perfection of the mind / and (love of) God, the perfection of love.”

So, when you become alumni tomorrow, and as you continue to pay off your student loans (which we really need you to do!), consider how well worth it your college education has been. Tonight thank your family for providing you with the opportunity to learn about the things that really matter. And now, let us go to the table of the Lord where we can all thank God for the promise of new life he gives to each of us in the Resurrection of his Son.

+ May God Be Blessed +

REV. THOMAS F. DAILEY, O.S.F.S., S.T.D.
Director

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1 Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses.*
2 Daniel B. Smith, “The University Has No Clothes,” *New York Magazine, 5/1/11.*
3 James Altucher (venture capitalist) & Peter Thiel (co-founder of PayPal), as referenced in “The University Has No Clothes.”
4 According to Mark Kantrowitz, publisher of Finaid.org, student loan debt will likely reach the trillions by or before the beginning of next year.
5 The Thiel Fellowship. See also the “UnCollege” movement launched by Dale Stephens
6 Galatians 5:16-25
7 John 17: 6a, 9-11, 14-17a