Sister President, Members of the Board of Trustees, Cabinet, Staff, Faculty, Families, and the Class of 2015. I am honored to be addressing you today.

Numbers have always been something that I take comfort in. I have always been the type of person who sees things in black and white rather than shades of grey. When you’re working with numbers, you have a set of rules to follow, and an exact answer at the end of a problem. When you put your pencil down you are either right or wrong; there is no in between. Numbers are consistent, eternal, objective, absolute and universal. They help to create the intricate network of truths that make up theories of math and statistics. There is no better feeling than looking at an equation and at first having it be completely foreign, and then simplifying it down to something understandable and applicable to real life. Numbers make sense—they are logical, and have the ability to give you proof of something. It is not often that one can get clear definitive proof of anything in life. Numbers give you that opportunity.

I wish I could say the world operated like a mathematical equation—if you follow all the rules, understand the theorems, and do every step right, you should be **guaranteed** to arrive at the correct answer. However, from my experience, real life is much more complex than even the hardest equation. You are **not guaranteed** a “correct” answer: you can follow all the rules, do everything you are “supposed” to do according to the norms of society, and still fail. And I have found that there is a reason for this. The older we get, we learn that rules do not govern us as an individual—our values do.
When I began my journey at St. Bonaventure as a concrete-thinking, uptight, somewhat neurotic business major, I expected to leave with a vast knowledge of management, marketing, accounting, and finance skills—and I am. But, I was less than thrilled to learn that I would be required to take a set of Clare courses as well. Eventually, I discovered there was a good reason that St. Bonaventure was challenging all of us with these courses. They were trying to instill in us something less tangible than a diploma. While we are all leaving here today with degrees that will surely help us to begin our careers, we are also leaving with a set of values that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives.

St. Bonaventure’s values statement focuses on three core values—discovery, community, and individual worth. Three of my Clare courses in particular showed me what these values really mean to me. I learned about the value of discovery when my Intellectual Journey professor challenged my class to open our eyes to the world around us, and find answers in places we otherwise wouldn’t look. The value of community became important to me when the University Forum taught me that it is not difficult to make a difference in other people’s lives. Finally, the value of individual worth was highlighted in the Good Life course, where we were each challenged to take a stance on controversial issues. I learned that although I may just be one person, I am in fact part of a bigger picture and the things I believe in as an individual do matter. While St. Bonaventure has taught me how to succeed in the world of business, it has also taught me things about myself that I’m not sure I would have uncovered otherwise.

I found that many of our professors taught us so much more than simply a content area. For instance, I had the pleasure of having Dr. Zahid Khairullah as a professor for several classes.
While he taught me the concrete things I have always enjoyed learning about, such as linear programming, simulation, and project management, he also liked to throw little life lessons at us as well. One day, in our Management Science class, we were given a homework problem to complete. The next class when we came in he was disappointed to see that very few of us had done it. He stood in front of the class, and questioned as to why so many of us failed to do the assignment, to which a few students claimed that they had tried but did not know how to do it. He walked around the classroom, and then posed another question: “How is it that you say you have tried, but I am only seeing blank sheets of paper on your desks?” He then explained to us that the first step to solving any problem is to write at least something down. Although in this circumstance he was talking about a homework assignment, I knew he was trying to tell us something more. **You are sure to fail if you don’t bother trying.** Today, our futures are like the blank sheets of paper that Dr. Khairullah saw in class that day, and now it is our responsibility to write something down. The knowledge, relationships, and values that St. Bonaventure has instilled in us will guide us in our journeys, starting today.

I will always be the person who enjoys saying “the limit does not exist” and actually understanding what it means in mathematical terms. I will always love derivatives, tangent lines, and the quadratic formula. I have spent the majority of my life concerned with finding an answer. Getting the “A.” Exceeding expectations. And yes, I believe that is important. It is why I am here, speaking to you today. But it is also important to understand that sometimes the answer is that there isn’t one. Or at least there isn’t just one answer that is “right” for everyone. I now have a newfound appreciation for problems that require more than a formula to solve. Black and white thinking is not constructive in a world with so many vivid colors. I am so grateful to St.
Bonaventure for making sure that I am leaving with a clear understanding of this. Although I am still the same person that I was when I came here, I believe that I am a better version of myself; I believe all of us are. To my fellow graduates: I urge you to never stop thinking critically, learning fiercely, and questioning persistently. Thank you and congratulations.