

COLLEGE OF
MOUNT SAINT VINCENT

Charge to the Graduates of 2013

Charles Flynn

Graduates of the College, at our Hooding ceremonies, I talked with you about the symbolism of the gowns and hoods you wear today. They represent your talents and achievements. They represent the power of learning and therefore they represent the obligation we share—the obligation to use our talents and achievements both for personal gain and for the good of others.

This past fall, Steven Spielberg released *Lincoln*, an extraordinary film. Some have criticized that film for showing the ways in which Lincoln maneuvered through the petty and even corrupt corridors of power to get Congress to pass a constitutional amendment forever prohibiting slavery. Some have praised the film for showing Lincoln's humanity – for recognizing that a gifted person of conscience was, like you and each of us, not a god but a person seeking to bend the course of events toward a better, more just world.

No one who goes to a movie entitled *Lincoln* should be surprised that it is ... well ... about Lincoln. He was human. He was part of this imperfect world and, like all of us, he made his way imperfectly, extraordinary though he was.

But the movie is not only about Lincoln. There are plenty of other characters. As in other Spielberg movies, one of the unusual qualities of this one is how well it captures not only the personality of a president, but also how it unsentimentally conveys in soldiers, housekeepers, secretaries, slaves, telegraph agents, and others the immense dignity and sacrifice of people who will, for us, forever be nameless. The movie really does remind us of how much we owe people who gave what they had and left this world better than they found it. The movie reminds us that we are not alone: we celebrate individuals but we live in community.

This College, founded through the sacrifice of the Sisters of Charity, is dedicated to your future—as individuals and free citizens. As we celebrate what you have achieved, the reminder fits.

Some of you may go on to become Lincolns or Corazon Aquinos, who will forever be remembered for how they served and sacrificed. Some of you will go on like most of us, to live in a smaller sphere.

Like Lincoln, like those brave, generous, conscientious, equally extraordinary, and (to us) nameless people, all of us only truly achieve when we are as devoted to the common good as we are to our own.

This is the life to which we are all called as individuals. This is what it means to be a child of God. This is democracy at its best.

The gift of your talents, the power of knowledge, the beauty of God's creation, and the beauty of your own soul call you with the power of hope to find what is sacred in yourself, to share of yourself with an open hand, and thus make sacred your way in the world.

Graduates of the College, your family, your friends, your teachers, your College are proud of you. For us, it has been a privilege to share these years with you. We think the world of you. And we thank you.