

Student Lasallian Commencement Address
May 2009
Presented by: Jose Guerrero

Good afternoon members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, **FAMILIAS** and friends:

(MUY BUENAS TARDES A TODOS)

Today I stand before you with a number of feelings generated by the great honor of being the Lasallian Speaker. I feel, first of all, very nervous. For it is not easy for me to stand in front of thousands of people and try to articulate this message in a congruent and clear manner. Luckily for me, and for **YOU**, I only get a few minutes, so it will be brief.

I also feel very satisfied. Extremely satisfied. For here and now, before you all, I can say with great pride (*con muchísimo orgullo*), that today, like many of you, I will be the first member of my entire family to receive a college degree. (*El primero en recibir un título universitario, señoras y señores. Y sere el primero de muchos.*) But let me tell you something.

You see, today it is not only me who is graduating. For this degree, even though it physically only bears my name, symbolically it also bears the names of my parents and my entire family, the names of my instructors, the names of my benefactors, and the names of all of those who gave me their support when I most needed it. This is why, over and above my feelings of satisfaction, pride, and nervousness, I feel infinitely thankful to all of them for having helped to make my dreams and **THEIR** dreams of seeing me at my graduation come true here today.

(POR ESTO MUCHISIMAS GRACIAS)

I want to tell you about a very important French priest, who many of you have probably heard about, especially those of you who are members of the Lewis University community. And if you haven't, you really should learn about him because he is truly quite an important individual. I will tell you why.

A little more than three and a half centuries ago this Catholic priest set out to help the less privileged part of French society, especially children in poverty. He gave up everything he had for his ideals. He gave it **ALL**; his wealth; his social position; his position in the church; and he even struggled against the authorities of his time, all this to make sure that as many **POOR CHILDREN** as possible could get a chance to improve their lives through education. This individual was Saint John Baptist de LaSalle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. In essence, he is also a founder of Lewis University.

Now more than 350 years later, with Lasallian schools in over eighty countries around the globe, with thousands of lay faculty and staff carrying on the Lasallian tradition of education, **AND** with over a million students whose lives have been transformed, the legacy of Saint John Baptist De LaSalle still lives on and is stronger than ever. I, ladies and gentlemen, along with many of you, am living proof of his legacy. Let me tell you why.

MORE THAN ONCE I was on the verge of becoming part of the statistics that represent the Hispanic college dropout rate. This was neither due to lack of willingness to keep going nor due to academic inefficiency. Rather, I was about to drop out of Lewis as a result **OF LACK OF FUNDS** to pay my tuition. Regardless of how hard my family tried to help me, paying for college just became unaffordable for us. Thankfully, **MORE THAN ONCE**, members of the Lewis community, loyal to their commitment to diversity, to an affordable education, and to the service to the poor, were there to lend me a hand.

Some way or another they did what they could to gather the necessary resources to assist me to remain a student at Lewis. This way, following the ideals of Saint John

Baptist De La Salle, they all made sure that my right to have an education was fulfilled. It was a genuine collective effort that reflected every aspect of the Lasallian mission. Thanks to them I came to form part of the positive statistics instead; the ones that show the number of Hispanics who make it through college successfully.

(Yo soy uno de ellos ahora. Un Hispano mas que se gradua de la Universidad. Y que pronto empezara su camino hacia un Doctorado en fisica medica.)

I wonder how many of you have stories like mine? Most likely, the answer is that there are many because of the economic crisis we are facing. The true question, however, remains: how many people **ARE OUT THERE WHO ARE WILLING** assist students in need. How many are willing **TO PROTECT** each person's right to have an education? How many are willing **TO GIVE** every person the **OPPORTUNITY** of developing their potential to become the persons who will save our planet, the persons who will fight social injustices and poverty, the persons who lead us to have a world of peace and harmony? In essence, I ask, how many people are willing to continue the legacy of Saint John Baptist De LaSalle?

Education transforms people, he knew this and that's why he sacrificed all he had.

Si senoras y senores, la educacion transforma a las personas.

Education transforms people. But it does so for the good of them. A truly good education such as the one that Lewis offers is part of what has allowed individuals with humble origins to become great leaders of our society such as Cesar Chavez, or Dorothy Day, or Abraham Lincoln, or Barack Obama. There is enough potential out there, **but what we need are opportunities**. This is why we ought to struggle against poverty and help those who are less fortunate, so that we can enable anyone to transform his or her life and contribute to our society in the most positive way.

I have been given the chance to be part of the wonderful Physics department at Lewis. There I have been transformed. My instructors have imparted me with vast amounts of knowledge, which has allowed me to have a deeper understanding of

how the universe and everything in it works. More than academic instructors, they have also been my mentors, friends, and family, which is typical of the Lewis community. I spent countless hours around them not only working on experiments but also listening to their life experiences and advice.

They have, without a doubt, provided me with the means to take my next step in life and in my academic career – I, like many of you, will not only go on to graduate school and continue my education, but will also make an effort to start giving back to the community that has helped me so much in the past four years.

I hope that your experience at Lewis was as life changing for you as mine was for me; and that your education transformed each of you into a better individual.

I want to leave you with the words of Former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela. He once said:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

I ask you to keep these words in mind and encourage all of you to go out there, pursue your dreams and help change the world.

Muchisimas Gracias.