

March 13, 2020. I drove into the parking lot of school, sun rising in my face, beeping at friends driving ahead, music blaring in the car trying to wake me up. Running up the stairs of Mercy High School struggling to balance my coffee, textbooks, and lunchbox in hand while simultaneously studying for a test first period. I approached my locker, threw my books in and began to start what no one expected to be, the last day of high school. These seemingly long mornings consisted of 2 tests, doodling during lectures, and an in class project presentation before lunch. All I was thinking about was when I'd get to go home. Lunch came and went as friends chattered about weekend plans and this confusing virus that no one had answers about. "There's no way we won't have prom." girls shouted as it seemed almost impossible to think. "Microsoft TEAMS? I don't even have my login for that." my friend next to me said as we laughed and brushed it off. Following, was my last class of the day. Being a senior, one of the perks is getting dismissed early when a study hall falls at the end of the day. I was exhausted from the long hours of dance and studying the night before, I couldn't wait to get back home. Well, 50 short minutes later the bell rang, and hustle and bustle continued throughout the Mercy hallways. I headed for the door to leave, not saying much to anyone, until my friend Meghan approached me in tears. I was confused, but being who she was I thought maybe she got a bad grade on a test or maybe a boy wasn't talking to her that day, typical problems in an all girls school. But instead, she says to me, "this could be our last day of high school together, our last day at Mercy, I just can't leave" Now, thinking she has lost her mind, I chuckled back. "Really Meghan? C'mon, there's no way." and I walked out and hopped in my car. Driving home, I'm not going to lie, I did think for a second, if she could actually be right about high school being over, and here I am clueless and already halfway home with books in my locker and teachers I never thought I'd need to say goodbye to. Well, I guess I should have listened to her. I guess I shouldn't have wished all day to be back in bed, or dreaded putting on my uncomfortable plaid uniform skirt that morning. And little did I know I'd be sitting here saying I regret saying no to a hug from one of my friends who thought I just needed it. But, I think along with many other Seniors, I can say that this "last day" of high school was unexpected and taken for granted by many.

Today, June 14, we've been in our homes for 93 days and counting. These days have allowed plenty of time to do the things we've been saying we want to do but couldn't with a busy schedule. So yay right? I am at home able to get rest and sleep, doing what I was eager to do months ago, but now this doesn't seem so special anymore. Now, instead of being at home relaxing, I feel like my mind has been going and going more than ever. I just can't help but question God. Why? Why 2020? Why now when spring months tend to be the busiest and most fun? Why right when life seems to be so good, does something that seems so terrible have to happen? Is it so terrible? Deep down seniors are filled with indignation and anguish. I wish I could say that I was okay and came to terms with four years of high school turning into the last 4 months in my house. Of course there are more important things to be worrying about right now like the people dying and catching this virus, but as a teenager it really is hard to come to terms with. I wanted to walk across that stage at graduation, to celebrate with my friends all of the hard work we have gone through to get to this moment, but we can't. We can't do what we have been counting down the days for. We can't be with loved ones. Sitting at home has been turned to a normal. So where do we turn to next? Well, I'd like to believe there is a reason. There is a

reason our class of 2020 was quote on quote “chosen” for this challenge. We could continue to dwell, and question every decision and reason why for everything happening, but at the end of the day, life will go on. For me, It has been difficult, and there have been many tears, but after a while, I figured sometimes life doesn’t always go as planned. In 3 months myself, along with the two other senior parishioners, Devin and Aymen, will be going off to college. We’re going to be meeting new people, facing new challenges, and all in all pursuing our future careers. So this is when I decided to make a pact with myself. Yes, it’s hard to move forward with the next 4 years of life in college, when it’s as if there was no real ending to the last 4 in high school. And yes, Maybe God has thrown a bump in the road with this pandemic, but I can’t and won’t allow that to stop me. Along with myself, it isn’t going to stop anyone else out there. Not the fifth graders leaving elementary school, eighth graders moving to the big grounds of high school, seniors in college entering the real world. Life will move on for us and get better. And even though our friends are dispersing miles apart for college, there will always be a common home ground.

For me, a home place is St.Pauls. A place where I’ve been accepted, felt gratitude, been encouraged, and possibly when I was younger a place that felt like pulling teeth to get me to on Sunday mornings. St.Paul’s has taught me lessons that have made me a stronger woman. The people of St. Pauls have allowed me to grow spiritually and gave me powerful life teachings. Back being a little girl I’d sit in the pews of church with my parents and play with little Cinderella toys or scribble in my fluorescent coloring books and just wait until Mom or Dad gave me that nudge that it was time to go and receive communion. It may not have quite seemed as though I was paying attention, but constantly was I thinking. I was young, so I may not have understood the true, deep meaning of the Gospel passages or Homily the priest had been projecting, but I did grasp some things. I did know why we got dressed up to go chase easter eggs in the side yard, and why we practiced for weeks prior to performing at the Christmas Eve pageant. When I was this little girl I didn’t think in ten years I’d be preaching on a Sunday morning to the St. Paul’s community. But thanks to God and to everyone at St.Pauls, listening and supporting me, all the unimaginable feels that much more imaginable. That’s the beauty of God and his people. When we think we can’t, he proves we can. When we think life is at the low, he shines through and proves there is always higher to reach.

We are going to get through this. We can do something great for ourselves, moving forward in the future because God knows we can. I may not have participated in the annual activities of a high school senior, but that’s only a small piece in the scheme of life. Sometimes it’s the bigger picture we need to look at. We have to take that extra moment to sit back, close our eyes and think of what we have, who we’ve become, and the best people close by that continue bringing you up. So I ask this question again, Is all of this chaos in the world so terrible? If we turn to God and trust in him, maybe it isn’t. There are many things I would have done differently on the unknown last day of high school, but my attitude moving onward is where I can be different. So, I challenge you to make a pact with yourself. Don’t allow one more day to go by where you aren’t grateful for the life you have or for how far you’ve come thus far. Go out and do something that will make yourself and God smile. Take it from me, I may just be a seventeen year old girl who only gets to talk to you for a short time, but hey, I’m a part of the class of 2020. My mom says someday that will be “cool” to say. Maybe not yet, but trust in the

Lord and and together strength will be renewed. Take the moment you need and allow the Lord to do his thing.