

The Pursuit of Aretê



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It is a great honor and privilege for me to deliver this year's David O. McKay Lecture. This event honors a marvelous man who was instrumental in the founding and growth of this university - a scholar, a teacher, and a prophet. I am intensely aware that this occasion is designed to enlighten our minds and to inspire our souls. I am grateful for the opportunity of sharing some ideas with you about a subject that is both timely and timeless.

Characteristics of our Time

The world students experience today is a different world than the one in which I grew up and different still than the world of my parents or grandparents. Three characteristics, among many, distinguish those living in the twenty-first century.

The first characteristic is the belief that success requires specialization. We observe it in medicine and law, in business and academia. We see it in athletics at earlier and earlier ages. The pressure to specialize in order to succeed begins in some sports before grammar school.

A second characteristic is the speed and pace of our lives. We are impatient and seem to grow more impatient as technology accelerates quickly in so many ways. Technological advances have brought us many conveniences - communication and travel are more ubiquitous and broadly available. Once we have experienced such conveniences we come to expect them and to take them for granted.

It may surprise some of you students to know that it wasn't many years ago when research was a long and time consuming process. Books and journals were searched for and then searched through for information that is available to you in seconds as you use Internet search engines. Before word processing, entire papers were retyped by hand when errors or changes were found in the early paragraphs or pages.

Sadly, many do not consistently use the great savings of time for reflection, study or service. We fill our lives from the pull of a world made smaller by the technology that should have freed us.

A third characteristic of our time is the attraction for shortcuts. By this I mean a willingness to accept the shallow and the superficial; adopting a path because it is easy rather than demanding. Remember, it is the path of least resistance that makes both men and rivers crooked. As you reflect on these characteristics of our time, I

invite you to step back with me several centuries to another day as we seek for wisdom in dealing with our world. The place is ancient Greece and the concept is excellence.

The Essence of Arete

[Arete](#)(????), perhaps the most articulated value in Greek culture, is the Greek term for excellence. Aristotle referred to Arete as *virtue*. Virtue in Aristotle's time, however, held a vastly different meaning than it does today.

Realizing Potential. The English word, virtue, comes from the Latin word *virtus*. *Virtus*, in turn, comes from *vir* meaning "man" in the masculine sense. It is manliness, manhood, the sum of all the corporeal or mental excellences of man: strength, vigor; bravery, courage; aptness, capacity; worth, wisdom, piety; endurance, self-control, goodness. In its earliest appearance in Greece this notion of excellence was bound up with the fulfillment of purpose or function; the act of living up to one's full potential.

Effort - Doing One's Best. A second dimension of arete is the concept of great effort - of doing one's best. It does not require defeating or prevailing over others. It is essentially being and doing one's absolute best - becoming the best person one can become. The moral excellence or arete of a person or thing was virtue.

"The root of the word, arete, is the same as 'aristos', a term which denotes superlative ability and superiority." The meaning of the word changes depending on what it describes, since everything has its own particular excellence; the arete of a man is different from the arete of a horse. This way of thinking first comes from Plato, and can be seen in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. (Jaeger)

Regardless of its beginnings it was Aristotle who brought the concept of arete to its fullest state. Aristotle was a tutor in the household of Philip, King of Macedon, and taught Philip's son, Alexander (the Great), who was said to exemplify arete in his steadfast pursuit of excellence.

Today we use the word virtue to refer to a woman's chastity. As the renowned University of Chicago political philosopher Leo Strauss observed: "The mystery of Western thought is how a term that originally meant the manliness of a man came to mean the chastity of a woman."

A Journey Not a Destination. A third dimension of arete is the idea that life is a journey and not a destination. Arete was the Homeric Age's most significant contribution to Western culture. In many ways the Iliad and the Odyssey are tributes to this code of excellence. Arete was identified with those who excelled, struggled, overcame, and demonstrated their "skill and prowess as a soldier in war, and as an athlete in peace."

The opportunity to demonstrate arete was why many Greeks went to Troy. Achilles was one of the best examples. In Homer's Iliad, Achilles is referred to as "strong," "swift, and "godlike" (1.129; 1.140); "the great runner" (1.224), and "the best of the Achaeans" (16.279). Arete is like a cloth being tightly weaved with good (agathos), glory (kleos), honor (tim?), and love of honor (philotimia).

Some might assume that arete is a masculine trait. For Homer, however, arete is not gender specific. Rather, arete is the exercised application of one's highest effectiveness. It is a combination of skill, wit, cleverness, bravery, and strength. For Homer, Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, was a woman of arete. Indeed, [Penelope](#) is praised by Agamemnon for her arete as it relates to cooperation.

It is Penelope's husband, Odysseus, the King of Ithaca, however, who is perhaps the best example of arete in Greek literature. Odysseus was more than an athlete and warrior. He overcame all obstacles and trials, in developing honor, glory, and excellence.

Those familiar with Homer's epic, the Odyssey, will remember that Odysseus lands on the island of Phaeacia, where he was rescued and participated in sports at the Phaeacians' court, besting many of their athletes. He proved himself excellent in all manner of activities, demonstrating his arete. He gained the favor of Queen Arete, who recognized the great stature of this fugitive and was sympathetic toward him. The poets sang his praises, yet he refrained from boasting.

His idea of the Trojan Horse reflected his arete with respect to strategy as did his craftiness in blinding Polyphemus, the Cyclops. Over many years, Odysseus survived the challenges and trials that claimed the lives of all his men. He, alone, made it home.

When he finally returned home, after a 20 year absence, he tested Penelope to see if her heart had strayed and discovered that even after his prolonged absence she had proven faithful. Through his ordeal, Odysseus was thoughtful, quick thinking under pressure, articulate, and subtle. He demonstrated athletic prowess and cleverness in bringing an end to the 10 year conflict between the Achaeans (Greeks) and Troy. He outsmarted and out maneuvered a much stronger Ajax, and his bravery in combating the many challenges that Poseidon presented him on his 10 year journey home from Troy set Odysseus apart as the Greek ideal of arete. This epic is a marvelous story illuminating that arete truly is a journey and not a destination.

Developing Arete

Having explored three important dimensions of arete - that it involves us realizing our potential, that its essence is continuous improvement and that it views life as a journey and not a destination -- let us now turn our attention to what it takes to develop arete.

We have no better guide than Epictetus, a Greek Stoic philosopher who lived between AD 55 and 135. Epictetus spent most of his life as a slave in Rome. He was later exiled to Nicopolis, in Northwestern Greece, where he founded an academy.

Thoughtful Consideration - A Consequentialist Mentality. The Greeks understood that life involves making choices. In making those choices an important element is to adopt what Epictetus called, "thoughtful consideration." At its heart is the concept of a consequentialist mentality - that in making decisions we must place our choices in an eternal context and recognize that one choice leads to another and to another. As we develop, additional opportunities emerge. Our choices can open or close doors.

Listen to ageless counsel from Epictetus found in Discourses, Book III, Chapter 15:

In every act consider what precedes and what follows, and then proceed to the act. If you do not consider, you will have not thought at all of the things which follow; but afterward, when some consequences have shown themselves, you will basely desist. "I wish to conquer at the Olympic games." "And I too, by the gods: for it is a fine thing." But consider here what precedes and what follows; and then, if it is for your good, undertake the thing.

Discipline. Epictetus then turns attention to a second quality that is essential in developing arete - discipline.

You must act according to rules, follow strict diet, abstain from delicacies, exercise yourself by compulsion at

fixed times, in heat, in cold; drink no cold water, nor wine, when there is opportunity of drinking it. In a word you must surrender yourself to the trainer as you do to a physician.

Epictetus is talking about training for an athletic event, but he is also giving general advice - follow the rules (obey the commandments), strictly observe to do certain things and to abstain from others, surrender yourself not to your desires but to your trainer, him to whom we look as a guide and mentor.

The road of discipline is neither easy nor short. In his Autobiography, Benjamin Franklin relates the story of a man who purchased an axe from the village smith. The man "desired to have the whole of [the] surface [of the axe] as bright as the edge. The smith consented to grind it bright for him, if he would turn the wheel; he turned, while the smith pressed the broad face of the axe hard and heavily on the stone, which made the turning of it very fatiguing. The man [stopped] every now and then from the wheel to see how the work went.... at length [he said he] would take his axe as it was, without further grinding. "No," said the smith, "turn on, turn on, we shall have it bright by and by; as yet it is only speckled." "Yes," said the man, "but *I think I like a speckled axe best.*" (This story is found in chapter VI, The Art of Virtue)

The pursuit of excellence, of arete, does not settle for a speckled axe. It recognizes that true excellence requires much effort and time. Success does not come instantly or quickly. Our shiny axe is the product of a lifetime.

As we shine our axe, we do not get to pick the circumstances of our lives. Some days will be cold and rainy; others warm and sunny. We will experience times when the winds are at our back lifting us on. At other times we will face headwinds where we struggle and work and seemingly make little progress.

Machiavelli observed that:

A truly great man is ever the same under all circumstances; and if his fortune varies, exalting him at one moment and oppressing him at another, he himself never varies but always preserves a firm courage, which is so closely interwoven with his character that everyone can readily see that the fickleness of fortune has no power over him. (Niccoló Machiavelli, The Discourses. 1517)

Competing Not Winning. Third, Epictetus reminds us that we develop arete or excellence by doing. This is not an exercise in observing.

Next in the contest, you must be covered with sand, sometimes dislocate a hand, sprain an ankle, swallow a quantity of dust, be scourged with the whip; and after undergoing all this, you must sometimes be conquered. After reckoning all these things, if you have still an inclination, go to the athletic practice... Discourses, Book III, Chapter 15

Interestingly, Epictetus emphasizes competing and not winning. He does not promise or counsel seeking victory in every contest. Rather, he suggests that we will experience challenge, adversity, and that we will lose some contests as well as win others. Sometimes we will be "conquered." We will find ourselves covered with sand and sustain sprains and other injuries. The path he describes is hardly an easy one. As Hesiod pointed out over 2,500 years ago, "there has to be sweat before arete." (Hesiod p. 289)

Theodore Roosevelt pointed out his understanding of this process when he said:

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself for a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least

he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat." ("Citizenship in a Republic," Speech at the Sorbonne, Paris, April 23, 1910)

Those who seek arete are satisfied with their best effort. They know and understand that they will not always win or more importantly that winning all the time isn't necessary in developing arete. Those who compete quickly learn that they will win some contests and lose others. Arete was thus not an end (telos), but rather a constant call to action that produced particular habits. It was a repeated and a repeatable style of living. (Hawhee, 187)

Balance. In addition to thoughtful consideration, discipline, and competing, there is a fourth essential element in developing arete or excellence and that element is balance.

Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics (most likely written for his son), said that "to experience [fear, confidence, desire, anger, pity, etc.] at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason, and in the best manner - that is the median and the best course, the course that is a mark of arete." Book II, ch. 6 (1106b20)

Mentor, a wise, older friend of Odysseus, was given the responsibility of teaching and guiding Telemachus when Odysseus left to fight against Troy. When Telemachus was older, and still waiting for the return of his father, Mentor reminded Telemachus that although Achilles was invincible and spread terror and death wherever he fought he never left Troy but suffered death there himself. Mentor noted how Odysseus allowed prudence to govern his courage and that the combination of Odysseus' cleverness and martial skills finally brought down the walls of Troy. Our use of the word mentor today comes from this teacher of Telemachus.

The median that Aristotle refers to is the same median or balance that Mentor counseled Telemachus to follow. Aristotle referred to this balance as the "golden mean." Courage, for example, is the mean between cowardice and foolhardiness. Similar balances can be found in all aspects of life.

Training - The Quest for Excellence in Mind, Body, and Soul

Arete, the pursuit of excellence, was a significant part of the paideia, the ancient Greek process of training boys to become men. This training in arete included: physical training, for which the Greeks developed the gymnasium; mental training, which included oratory, rhetoric, and basic sciences; and spiritual training, which included music and what is called virtue. The paideia sought a balance of physical, mental, and spiritual training all pointing toward arete, excellence, becoming your best; reaching your highest human potential.

The Greeks began this training at a young age. They believed that good habits, learned during one's youth, would benefit the individual and the society. In doing so, they were embracing the wisdom of King Solomon taught nearly 500 years earlier. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

Arete is not about winning or competition or a quest for superiority. It is about intellectual, physical and spiritual excellence. It may be demonstrated in a competition, but it is not about the outcome as much as it is the process. Arete is a matching of practice and potential and should not be limited by the nature of the task. It is the realization of a man's total potential.

The Isthmian Games, sponsored by the city of Corinth, were one of the four Sacred and Crown Games and along with Olympia, Delphi, and Nemea constituted a sort of Grand Slam for competitors. The Isthmian Games began in 582 B.C.E. just under 200 years after the first competition honoring Zeus began at Olympia in 776 B.C.E. (Spivey, 71).

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Saints he had taught in Corinth, referred to these well known games and the process of striving for victory and demonstrating arete.

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:

But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. (I Corinthians 9:24-27)

Let us examine more closely Paul's analogy. Athletes were required to prove their lineage, participate in month long elimination rounds, and walk from the host city to the site of the Games (sometimes as far as 40 miles as in the case of Elis and Olympia).

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?" Hundreds maybe thousands of young men trained long hours for a chance to demonstrate their arete and achieve what they considered earthly immortality. The training was part of the paideia, the rites of passage from youth to manhood. There would have been instant understanding of Paul's words on the part of the Corinthian saints who read his letter.

Paul goes on, "So run, that ye may obtain." Paul is reminding them that they have experienced and observed large numbers of men and boys who train and commit themselves to the pursuit of arete with little chance for winning the pine wreath given to victors at the Isthmian Games. (Perrottet 53) It is in the running that we obtain. In other words, what is keeping you from the pursuit of arete in the gospel arena?

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." The process of training that was required of competitive athletes was also required of all youth. There was sacrifice involved. Sacrifice in diet, in rest, in training, in focus, in all things. The Corinthian saints knew the regimen. Many of them had probably dreamed of winning a crown at their sacred games. Paul then brings them back to reality by saying, "Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." Here Paul plays on the attitude of arete; on the good and the glory; the honor and the love of honor. And Paul intimates that all can win the prize and that this prize will never wilt or rust or fade away.

"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:"

There is no certainty, no guarantee, and no sure thing, in competition. But still, Paul fights, he works, he has real intent. He may be on his knees pleading for knowledge or forgiveness; he may be serving others. Paul is certainly productive from an eternal perspective, as someone developing the movements of a sprinter. What a beautifully descriptive phrase, "not as one that beateth the air:"

Paul closes by indicating that it takes action not words to achieve success. Like arete that must be demonstrated in competition or battle, before a discerning audience, so living the gospel must also be a public display of what we have become and are becoming. Applied to academic learning it might be the productive and active use of

knowledge not just remembering it for an exam.

Arete is purposeful; it is also enjoyable. For those who have developed arete what makes a memorable experience is not the winning but the excellence of the competition.

For those who have never experienced the qualities that combine to produce arete, they observe it in disbelief in others. In 480 B.C.E. during the Greek invasion by Xerxes and the Persian army, Herodotus (Histories 8.26.3) reports two Persian officers in conversation. "Good heavens, Mardonius, what kind of men are these that you have pitted us against? It is not for money they contend but for glory of achievement!"

Most of us think of Plato as a thinker, philosopher, and author. The best preserved portrait of Plato, however, appears on a herm from his gymnasium and on it he wears the ribbon of an athletic victor. Plato is not even his real name, which was "Aristocles" but a nickname he received from his wrestling days. Plato means "broad" and most likely refers either to his physical appearance or to his competitive stance or style. (Miller 1, 236)

One of my former players and an eventual university valedictorian, K.P. Balaraj, quoted Plato in his application essay as follows:

He who is only a student is too weak, too effeminate.

He who is only an athlete is too crude, too masculine.

The ideal citizen is the scholar-athlete,

A man of thought and a man of action.

To lead a life filled with arete, one must engage their mind, body, and soul. Athletics must be present but not dominant, in the whole man. The same is true of cognitive learning. It is a part of building a complete man but only a part.

In the Republic, Plato wrote a conversation between Socrates and Glaucon. (p. 300).

Soc: And as there are two principles of human nature, one the spirited and the other the philosophical, some God, as I should say, has given mankind two arts answering to them (and only indirectly to the soul and body), in order that these two principles (like the strings of an instrument) may be relaxed or drawn tighter until they are duly harmonized.

Gla: That appears to be the intention.

Soc: And he who mingles music with gymnastic in the fairest proportions, and best tempers them to the soul,

may be rightly called the true musician and harmonist

in a far higher sense than the tuner of the strings.

Gla: You are quite right, Socrates.

This dialogue focuses on the integration of the body and the mind in the service of the soul. President David O. McKay was a staunch supporter of this balance in education. In the April 1928 General Conference, he reminded us:

"True education does not consist merely in the acquiring of a few facts of science, history, literature or art, but in the development of character. True education awakens a desire to conserve health by keeping the body clean and undefiled. True education trains in self-denial and self-mastery. True education regulates the temper, subdues passion and makes obedience to social laws and moral order a guiding principle of life. It develops reason and inculcates faith in the living God as the eternal loving Father of all."

Arete requires action. It requires a real life demonstration of skill. It does not require defeating someone else. Its essence is self improvement. We are not created equal. We do not, for example, have the same opportunities to excel in sports. We have different amounts of fast twitch muscle fiber, varying heights, body types, hand-eye coordination skills, muscular strength, oxygen uptake capacity, etc. However, individual arete is still possible. More than one can receive the prize.

Aristotle said: "It is necessary to define as vulgar any pursuit, craft, or science which renders the body, soul, or mind of free men useless for the practice of arete."

He went on to observe:

"It is therefore clear that there is an aspect of education which ought to be taught to our sons not because it is useful or necessary, but because it frees the spirit and ennobles the soul. It is also clear that some of the useful things ought to be studied by the young not only because of their utility, such as reading and writing, but also because they can lead to the study of other things. In the same way drawing should be studied, not so that one might not be cheated in buying and selling equipment, but rather because this study makes a man observant of beauty. (Politics 1337a-1339a; A 189)

The philosophy of a liberal arts education came from this period of Greek history where all knowledge was interwoven. History, drama, poetry, literature, art, music, philosophy, politics, and gymnastics, were not idle pursuits but interconnected activities with the sciences vitally related to the good of the individual and society. The Greeks believed that the ideal individual knew how to balance the potentials of the mind and the body and to partake in moderation of all the good that life had to offer. The Greeks were also the first to point out the connection between critical thinking and personal growth.

Great centers of learning still understand this relationship of balance. Harvard University is widely recognized as a center of academic excellence. Less well known is that Harvard University fields 41 NCAA Division I athletic teams, more than any university in the country. Roughly one in four Harvard students participates in an intercollegiate varsity sport at some time during their four years as an undergraduate. Moreover, most of the remaining students participate in the university's extensive intramural sports program. It is part of a culture that emphasizes physical as well as intellectual excellence.

The Long Path to Arete

In ancient Greece, arete or excellence was demonstrated skill. It was the repeated performance of excellent actions that produced arete. Athletes continued to compete over and over again. The same was true of musicians, artists, poets, etc. Arete became a way of life.

Scholars of elite performance have identified what is often referred to as a 10-year rule: it seems that one must invest at least a decade of focused work to master something and bring greatness within reach. In a study which concluded in 1985 of 120 elite athletes, performers, artists, biochemists and mathematicians, led by University of Chicago psychologist Benjamin Bloom, every individual in the study took at least a decade of hard study or practice to achieve international recognition. Olympic swimmers trained for an average of 15 years before making the team; the best concert pianists took 15 years to earn international recognition. Top researchers, sculptors and mathematicians put in similar amounts of time. This five-year study of many of the United States' top athletes, musicians, and scholars concluded that "drive and determination, not great natural talent, led to their extraordinary success." (*Los Angeles Times*, 17 Feb. 1985.)

Arete does not happen all at once. It involves gradually improving your skills, knowledge or performance through sustained effort; it is not being perfect.

We may say "that was a perfect performance" and maybe even it is judged so (as in the case of Nadia Comaneci of Romania in the 1976 Olympics) but that is not perfection (*teleios*) it is excellence (*arete*).

Elder Russell Nelson gives the following insight from his study of the English and Greek editions of the New Testament relative to the term "perfect" and its derivatives.

In Matt. 5:48, the term *perfect* was translated from the Greek *teleios*, which means "complete." *Teleios* is an adjective derived from the noun *telos*, which means "end." The infinitive form of the verb is *teleiono*, which means "to reach a distant end, to be fully developed, to consummate, or to finish." Please note that the word does not imply "freedom from error"; it implies "achieving a distant objective." In fact, when writers of the Greek New Testament wished to describe perfection of behavior--precision or excellence of human effort--they did *not* employ a form of *teleios*; instead, they chose different words.

The word the Greeks chose for excellence of human effort was arete. Plato knew (Protagoras 361A) that arete could not be taught. It had to come from within. In athletics we refer to this drive and determination as "fire in the belly." It comes from being with the best, observing the best, believing that you can be the best. It involves

confidence as well as humility. My father taught me at an early age that, "There are no menial tasks there are only menial attitudes." Those who seek arete are trained, willing, and look forward to doing whatever it takes.

The Greek system of learning was one of participation not observation. Academies were centered around the gymnasium where exercise was a part of daily life. It was here that discussion took place and critical thinking was developed on a variety of topics as teachers guided students through questions that stimulated thought. This is sometimes referred to as the Socratic Method.

There were no multiple choice tests. The tests were the competition. An athlete prepared in form, flexibility, strength, endurance, strategy, nutrition, and adaptability. In similar ways competitors in poetry and prose, acting, music, painting, and oratory, were likewise prepared without knowing what the competition would bring from across the Greek world. Although I am guessing I suspect that teachers at Greek centers of learning never heard the question, "Will that be on the test?"

Similarly, this life is our test. "For behold, this life is the time for men to prepare to meet God;" (Alma 34:32) Josiah Gilbert Holland penned,

Heaven is not reached at a single bound;

But we build the ladder by which we rise

From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,

And we mount to its summit round by round.

Education, the process of developing critical thinking and arete, does not happen at all once. It happens line upon line, precept upon precept, competition by competition, round by round.

Every day is a new opportunity to learn and to demonstrate arete. No two days are the same. No two class periods or practice sessions are the same. As Heraclitus said, "You cannot step into the same river twice, for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you." Arete is developed, and maintained, one day at a time.

The ancient Israelites were required to gather their manna daily (Exodus 16). Arete or excellence in all aspects of our life must also be gathered daily. Physical exercise is an example of how we must maintain our commitment to health and fitness although our time for the challenges of the Olympic Games may have passed.

Aristotle dealt with this issue when he said:

Beauty varies with each age . . . In the young man, beauty consists in having a body that can endure all sorts of exertion in running or in violent force, and one that is delightful to gaze on. That is why pentathletes are the most beautiful, being trained for both power and speed events. For men in their prime, beauty belongs to those prepared for the toils of active service: such types are good-looking and awe-inspiring at the same time. As for the old man, beauty here means being physically able to deal with inevitable tasks, and not be a nuisance to others . . . (Rhetoric 1361b)

We cannot rest on the laurels of the past. We must daily seek for arete. If we do not we may find ourselves moving in a direction away from our dreams. As in riding a bicycle there is only one direction you can coast.

I encourage you to consider the message of arete. Consider the benefits that will flow from hard work, long hours, and years of effort, even with perhaps little to show for it except the inner knowledge that you have "fought a good fight," that you have given your best.

Marcus Aurelius, perhaps the last great Caesar of Rome said,

If any man is able to convince me and show me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in his error and ignorance. (Meditations, Book VI: 21)

Change is not easy, and neither is arete. Booker T. Washington once said that, "Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way." Most of our lives are spent doing common things. It is the way we do these common things, and how we approach them, that determines, in large part, whether we become someone who owns them or simply rents them for a time.

Let me explain. A mission is an intense time of training. It is a time to develop greater skills in prayer, in service, in love. It is not an end. It is a blessing, offered to those who qualify, of focused instruction and real "in the field" testing. It should not end or diminish when the two-year contest ends. There is still an entire season ahead.

Athletes train and learn and have their training and learning tested "on the field" of competition. The skills and lessons, if learned to a level of ownership, continue every day of their lives. The joys of skill and fitness continue as part of life because they have become a part of our life.

The counsel to "seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith," was loving advice, not for those enrolled in school but for those enrolled in life.

Arete is always preparing for the test, the battle, the competition. We don't know when it will come. Will we *let virtue garish our thoughts unceasingly* so that we become someone who can call upon the power of the Priesthood when needed? Will we select foods (in moderation) and exercise and rest appropriately so that we can *run and not be weary and walk and not faint*? Will we make time to arm ourselves with *light and truth* as we seek to gain intelligence?

This is the message of the Greeks, the message of balance, the message of greatness, the message of the arete.

Today is our day. Give thoughtful consideration to arete. Consider what it will take. Choose the road less traveled and it will make all the difference. Take full advantage of the broad base of education you are offered here. Slow down and allow for meaningful moments with friends, nature, and God. And finally, internalize the fact that there are no shortcuts to arete, happiness, or heaven.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.