



BOSTON COLLEGE

BOSTON COLLEGE FIRST YEAR ACADEMIC CONVOCATION ANNUALLY EXHORTS NEW STUDENTS TO HEED IGNATIUS' CALL

U.S. SENATOR JOHN McCAIN OFFERS 2006 KEYNOTE ADDRESS

CHESTNUT HILL, MA (9-22-06) -- Early in each academic year, first year students at Boston College take part in a tradition in honor of the parting words of St. Ignatius of Loyola to St. Francis Xavier, who was carrying the Gospel to the East: "Go set the world aflame."



Each September, the freshman class participates in the First Flight Procession, a torchlit walk across campus from the University's main gate on Linden Lane -- where members of BC's Jesuit Community gather to add their own exhortation to that of Ignatius -- down the lengthy expanse known as the Higgins stairs to Conte Forum for their First Year Academic Convocation.

Go Set the World Aflame: The First Flight Procession (Photo by Suzanne Camarata.)

The Ignatian-themed procession and convocation ceremony debuted at BC in 2004 with internationally-noted humanitarian Dr. Paul Farmer as its featured speaker. Last year, U.S. Senator Barack Obama (D-III.) addressed the students.

This year's keynote remarks came from U.S. Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.), a presidential candidate in the 2000 election, a former prisoner of war in Vietnam and a strong proponent of public service in the United States.

"We must represent to the world -- even in perilous times when we confront enemies who share none of our values, who scorn the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- the values that ennoble our history," said McCain, who has been an outspoken advocate for reform in campaign finance, U.S. immigration policies and the treatment of detainees. "We must always show that world that those values are dearer to us than anything; that they are dearer than life itself."

"I served with men of extraordinary character," said McCain, a former Naval aviator, who was held prisoner in Vietnam for more than six years after his aircraft was shot down over Hanoi in 1967. He and his fellow prisoners were often interrogated while held in captivity.

"Often they were tortured and compelled to make statements criticizing our country and the cause that we had been asked to serve."

But many of these men, McCain said, resisted their captors' demands -- often made with assurances that no one would ever know of their acquiescence -- by declaring "I will know."

"Those days were long ago, but not so long ago that I have forgotten their purpose or their reward," McCain told the audience of 2,250 members of the Class of 2010 and an additional 2,000 members of the Boston College community.

"This is your chance to make history," he said. "I wish you more than good luck; I wish you the most important thing in the world: I wish that you always hear the voice in your own heart as you face the hard decisions in your life, to hear it say to you again and again, until it drowns out every other thought: 'I will know. I will know. I will know.'"



US Senator John McCain address the convocation. Photo by Suzanne Camarata.

McCain's address drew three standing ovations from the audience. "I really thought it was meaningful," said Patrick Cassidy, a freshman from Milwaukee. "He gave us some great hope for our country," added first-year student Sam Hay from Charlotte, NC. "Our goal is to make a difference."

"I truly believe that Senator McCain focused our students upon the essential mission of undergraduate education," said Rev. Joseph Marchese, director of BC's First Year Experience Program, which oversees the convocation ceremony.

"It has always been the tradition of liberal arts colleges that they speak not only of intellectual life but also of the grooming of citizens, not only for a particular nation, but also for the world. [Senator McCain] invoked an enthusiastic response from the students to be involved in that mission," Fr. Marchese said.

"It was a great way to start," added freshman Brittany Lewis of Lockport, NY.

As a prelude to convocation, incoming freshmen are each given a book to read during the summer; this year's choice was Robert Coles' "Lives of Moral Leadership: Men and Women Who Have Made a Difference."

"Robert Coles and Senator McCain are busy men who have never shied from acting upon what they have seen 'needed doing' for the betterment of others," Fr. Marchese said. "They both see the possibility of leadership among the masses. This moral leadership, as Coles would describe it, is 'sacrifice for a cause greater than self-interest.'"

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