

The following speech was presented by Ms. Kristin Cupillari, Loyola's Dean of Students, at morning assembly on May 17, 2010. She shared her reflections on the Grad at Grad characteristic: "A Loyola student is becoming more Loving."

It is funny what a person does and does not remember around certain life events. On the morning of September 12th, 2001, I don't recall how many friends' calls I still had left to return from the night before. I don't remember when I finally got through to my parents and my then boyfriend, now husband. I don't know how my friend, Sunita, and I decided the best thing to do that morning was to get away from the news, get together, and get out of our apartments. I don't know where I found the courage to approach a local firefighter and thank him.

I do recall with great clarity the blue of the sky and the warmth of the sun. I remember how incredibly calm and quiet it was – quite a contrast from the day before; polite traffic – not one honking horn. I can still picture the faraway look of Evie, a former student of Sunita's and mine, whom we ran into on the street. I remember how helpless I felt after hearing her story while at the same time feeling so grateful for her life. I recall multiple conversations with random strangers - the woman on line at the grocery store, the man waiting next to me for the light to change – each of us inquiring if the other was okay, had we lost anybody. I remember gathering with Steve, Sunita, Tony, and Anil that evening, still hoping and praying that Mike might be heard from soon.

I can't pretend to understand how the tragic events of September 11th have affected each of you, or how you may continue to seek healing and understanding. I pray regularly for those who need healing from that day. But, I also pray in gratitude, yes, strangely gratitude, for my experience of September 12th, 2001. For on that day, I had a real chance to better understand what God's intentions are about being a loving and caring community, what it means to "love your neighbor," and what Jesus may have meant by "the Kingdom of God." September 12th, gave me some real insight. More than any other day in my life, it didn't matter if you agreed with someone's politics; a person's opinions didn't even come into play. What a person believed, was passionate about, his or her preferences, prejudices, education, and income had no bearing on how we all

related to one another. I felt what it meant to connect to another human - soul to soul, heart to heart, one creature of God to another. For every person I passed on the street, I thought, "I wonder how he was affected. I wonder if she lost anyone." I realized every person had a story, a story maybe like Evie's. The fact that I didn't know a person's story didn't matter, well actually, that is exactly what mattered. That was the whole point. I began looking at each person as someone who had a story, family, friends, and coworkers. What became important was here is another soul, I have no idea what he or she may be going through, I need to be sensitive, kind, and considerate. This heart may be hurting, vulnerable, and fragile. In understanding nothing, I was able to be most understanding. I found people were treating each other with more intention and listening with more focus. Of course, I, too, was the recipient of similar kindness, focus, patience, and intention. Everyone, from a total stranger to a close friend, was treating me with immense care. People were full of care, they were being careful with me and with each other. It seemed that everyone was "others oriented." Interestingly enough, it was easy and natural.

Thankfully, we don't have to experience a tragedy to have these feelings. This is not the only time I have felt this grace. Often, when we return to school from our retreats or our trips to Camden, we are on a certain "high." Our hearts are on fire; we wonder how can we make this feeling last; what can I do now that I am home. When we are headed on our journey to Camden, we are in the mind set to be "others oriented" towards those whom we will be serving. But, what I also notice on those journeys, especially through the nightly reflections and prayer, we become more "others oriented" towards each other. We see each other as God sees us, as people with a story, maybe a story we know, maybe a story we don't know. That is not the point. In spite of our preferences, our differences, our politics, and our points of view, we begin to relate to each other heart to heart and soul to soul. We set aside our personal biases and are open to each other. We understand the vulnerability of our neighbor and we show care for our neighbor; we are careful with one another.

We can say similar things about our experiences on our retreats. We find ourselves in a small group with classmates about whom we really don't know that much. We may have our assumptions about these people based on their music preferences, how they act and what they say in certain classes, or whom they

hang out with. But in a short amount of time, we learn we really don't know these people the way we think we do. And here, too, we begin to set aside our biases, our issues, and our hurt, and we listen to each other with intention and focus. We see each other as creatures of God who deserve our care, kindness, and patience. We see each other as God sees us.

When I think of these moments, I think about the reading adults my age have heard at many weddings, maybe to the point that it becomes sing-song and risks losing meaning. But, thinking back to these particular contexts, this reading from Corinthians has real weight about how God expects us to understand Love:

*Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful;
it is not arrogant or rude;
Love does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrong doing , but rejoices in the right.
Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

It is true. In all of those moments I have mentioned, I felt God's love as patience and kindness. Rudeness and arrogance had no place. Who we were wasn't measured in terms of what we had accomplished, but whom and how we loved and who loved us. No one ever insisted on their own way. In fact, people seemed to always seek out what was best for the other person. There was a strength we had that allowed us to believe in goodness, to hope, and to endure.

So, the challenge I face, and maybe you do too, is how do we hang onto those moments? How do we replicate that way of relating to others without repeating those situations? How is that we have gone back to honking our horns and becoming impatient with the person ahead of us in the grocery line? How do we go back to being blind to a person's politics, and simply see each other as another heart created by God? How do we stop being distracted by the details of our own day to day life, and stop and notice the hearts with whom we interact every day? How do we become more loving to our neighbors?

I don't really have an answer. In fact, all I do know is that I fail at this "loving thing" more than I succeed. I guess I am just hopeful in knowing that this type of love is possible. I have lived it. I have received it. I have given it. If I can set aside my hurt and biases for one person in one moment, then I

believe it is possible for me to do the same for two moments, for two people, and then for three, and four, etc. I also believe I don't need to worry about whether I like someone in order to be loving and careful with them. If total strangers can treat each other with such care, then I should be able to do the same with my family, my friends, my students, my colleagues.

I guess I simply live in hope. I am comforted knowing that I don't need a better education, income, or position in life to become better at being a loving and caring person. I wake up every morning knowing what is possible and hoping I become better at loving my neighbor. I know God's commandment, "Love your neighbor," is a real possibility because I have lived it.