

The following speech was delivered by Veronica Hudson ('11) at morning assembly on May 21, 2010. "A Loyola Student Is Becoming More Loving"

"Love has no desire but to fulfill itself. To melt and be like a running brook that sings its melody to the night. To wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks for another day of loving." ~Kahlil Gibran

I am lucky. I have grown up in a very loving household; kisses goodnight and hugs are necessary to survive with my mother. I have never doubted my family's love for me and I think that this is part of why it is easy for me to care for others. I have experienced being loved and understand the power love has to help us get through horrific events. In my family we always say 'I love you' when we get off the phone. I have gotten over the embarrassment of saying it in front of my friends; I think that love and good relationships are something to be celebrated, not embarrassed about.

One of the most important examples of love in my life is my best girlfriend, my grandmom. At age 87 she is mother of 8 and grandmother of 20; she has loved many people. Ever since I was born we have been girlfriends. She nurtured me as a baby and I have had countless sleepovers with her ever since. She is amazing and has made it possible to form such a close bond with me across the generations. Now that we are both getting

older our roles have begun to reverse. I find myself looking to anticipate her needs because although she's amazing, I don't want her to try to carry the 30lb. potted plant when I'm there and obviously so strong. We chat about everything. My friends think it's funny that I gossip with her, but she's 87 and if she thinks my life is fun to hear about, then I like to fill her in. She is also so wise; as much as I wanted to think that at her age she would not understand my problems, I have come to realize that I was so wrong. If anything, she can give me great advice and encouragement. We are lucky that we have each other; I love her and she loves me and this connection with my grandmom is extremely important to me.

I have witnessed so many forms of love. Boyfriends, girlfriends scatter our school. Walking through Central Park I see mothers and fathers with their children. I see teams running and playing together and seeing all of these different relationships makes me happy.

But I have also witnessed instances where love was not a priority. Who here remembers the dramas of junior high? Well, I am a camp counselor at a sleep-away camp upstate and I work with 12 year old girls, and let me tell you, they can be difficult. They are at an age when cattiness is prevalent and being 'cool' takes precedence. My fellow counselors and I noticed a rift that was occurring between the girls. Originally we had

planned for separate outdoor overnights, but rain caused a change in plans resulting in a situation where the girls were all stuck in a room together; we were concerned. Would they fight? Would some feel left out? As we had expected, the girls formed closed circles with their sleeping bags. But as the night progressed, we were amazed by the results! We organized some activities for the entire group and they all participated. I started some games and encouraged inclusiveness and girls from all 'groups' were playing. We watched as they all mingled and chatted. It was rewarding to see the girls bridging the gap they had originally created. By the time we put on a movie, the girls were opening their circles—a true demonstration of loving for each other and maybe a little bit of openness to growth. The next day although there was not a radical change in their behavior, they were talking and including girls they had not thought much of just a day earlier.

Father Katsouros said in the end of his sermon last Thursday that St. Ignatius calls us to “go further still.” This really stuck with me. I believe that this applies to us in many ways, but especially in our call to love and respect each other. As I was listening to this phrase, it immediately made me think of the Christian service I do. I have volunteered at the Little Sisters of the Assumption church, where I was doing ESL tutoring. I believe my work with the kids is an expression of my love, but the call to “go further

still” challenged me. I was going and doing what I was supposed to, but I was tired after a full school day and once I traveled to Harlem, the kids could be restless and I might not have done the best possible job. I certainly enjoyed working with the kids, but I know that I can “go further still!” Now I want to prove that Loyola has engrained the loving value in me by doing my best work always. I understand that I am human and I cannot make magic when I am only working with the children every Thursday for an hour, but I can do my best in that hour. And if it takes 6 weeks for my tutee Roberto and me to get through one book, then it takes us 6 weeks; but I can say I tried to give him the best help I could.

We all experience love. We love others and we receive love. We choose when we want to show compassion and express our love, but when this expression becomes involuntary, we understand what St. Ignatius is teaching us. It is hard sometimes to be loving, but we all know from experience how much happier we feel when we give and receive love in return.

I challenge us all to respond to the call to love, the call to “go further still” and with that challenge believe we will be the better for our actions, loving, loved, and happily fulfilled.