

ND Response Rally
University of Notre Dame
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Chris Godfrey (ND Law '93)
Founder and President, Life Athletes

It was a long hard road, but 16 years ago my classmates and I received our Juris Doctor degrees just over there outside the Hesburgh Library under the gaze of “Touchdown Jesus”. I often joked about the similarity between my law school experience and my football career. They were pretty much the same, you just got beat up in a different sort of way.

And just as this Super Bowl ring is a symbol of excellence, so too is my Notre Dame law degree.

It is no ordinary degree. For not only does it attest to the study of the Civil Law, but it also attests to my study of the Natural Law under such great professors as Charles Rice, Ralph McInerny, and the late Ed Murphy. These were teachers who knew, and understood that the only *good* law is a *just* law. And the study of the Natural Law helped us to identify good laws, and to critique bad ones.

I chose Notre Dame because I wanted to see this bigger picture of life. I wanted to look beyond the passing world of power and influence, and into reality, which is the world God created. I figured that if I was

going to spend the necessary blood, sweat, and tears (not to mention my playoff bonus checks) on law school, I wanted to get the maximum return on my investment.

There were a handful of teachers who provided this instruction, but they were not the dominant voices on campus. While it was Notre Dame's promise of excellence that attracted many of us to the university in the first place, it is the waning of its commitment that brings us all together today.

Back to Basics

As a solution, permit me to offer a lesson that I learned during my football days. It is attributed to Vince Lombardi. Coach Lombardi, along with Knute Rockne (whom we honor here in this building) are considered by many to be the greatest football coaches ever. They were great coaches, in large part, because they were great teachers.

Like Rockne, Lombardi took a bunch of young men and he taught them how to play football so well that they became famous. And after a while his guys became more like celebrities than football players, and when that happened they started to play poorly.

To fix this problem, Coach Lombardi called a team meeting and scolded his players for losing their focus. And in order to regain it, they

would need to get back to basics. And perhaps to emphasize just how far they had fallen, he held up a ball and said “Men, this is a *football!*”

My point is this: in life, as in football, sometimes our focus turns from the mission to ourselves, and when that happens we need to get back to basics.

ND Response

So where can we at Notre Dame turn for *our* inspiration? What can serve as our model for returning to the basics? This is difficult to answer. Not because there is a dearth of possibilities, but rather because we have so many to choose from. Aside from the obvious inspiration to be found in our Faith and Church, there are many landmarks that are particular to our campus.

In the law school hangs a banner that proclaims, “If you want peace, work for justice.” In another place, there is a statue of Moses presenting us with the Ten Commandments. But for our present purposes let me draw your attention to a simple and yet profound motto carved over the Basilica’s side door: “God, Country, and Notre Dame.”

For God

God comes first for all the obvious reasons. Scripture tells us in Matthew 6:33, “Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” The cornerstone of returning to the basics is putting first things first. There are a lot of good things at Notre Dame, but if they keep us from better things they lose their goodness. There is nothing better than God.

For Country

The second part of our motto is “For Country”. The Declaration of Independence is our country’s rationale for its being. In it is the declaration that all men are endowed by their Creator with the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Again, notice the order. The right to life comes first. It is the building block of justice. Without it we cannot live together in peace. All of us who follow ND football should be very familiar with this statement because it is recited before every home football game.

More importantly, these rights were defended to the death by the Notre Dame alumni and servicemen whose names are inscribed in the very same Basilica doorway. The inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are the basics of our commitment to our great country, the United States of America.

For Notre Dame

And our motto is also the basics of our commitment to Notre Dame. The justice that our motto proclaims is more than just a pious platitude. And its continued defense is why we are all here today. We are participating in what made this university great.

Notre Dame, Our Lady, is honored by the Church as the “seat of wisdom” and “cause of our joy.” Much as Vince Lombardi held up the football, we point to Our Lady on the Golden Dome to remind us who and what Notre Dame was meant to honor and imitate. (I thanked her every morning on my way to class for letting me come to her university.)

And it’s only in a vigorous pursuit of the truth, especially the truth of human life and love, and a strong witness to their priority in human affairs, that Notre Dame will deserve the praise and prestige it desires. Only then will it be truly great.

Game ball

In the game of football we have a tradition of honoring the person or persons most responsible for a team’s successful outing. We do this by giving them the game ball. While our struggle is not yet over, *this day* is an important milestone in the battle for the soul of Notre Dame. Therefore I would like to recognize it with a game ball.

It is hard to pick a winner. So many people made many important contributions. Chief among them is our bishop John D'Arcy, as well as Fr. Miscamble and his fellow Holy Cross religious. They have courageously and patiently bourn their duty of witnessing to the truth.

But I think we can all agree that the students of the NDResponse team made a *heroic* contribution to our university. In the midst of their already heavy end-of-year schedules, they fought a very good fight. Thereby creating the best opportunity in almost 40 years for restoring our priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a football. And it belongs to those who never forgot the basics: first, God, second, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and third, this great school dedicated to Our Lady. The Notre Dame family is very proud of you. Thank you.