

Graduation Homily - May 21, 2006
Saint Augustine Prep
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If you haven't heard the hype of these last few months, then you must have been locked in a secret vault, lost in the Louvre Gallery or hermetically sealed in the tomb of Isaac Newton. Friday was opening night worldwide of the *DaVinci Code*. After years on the *New York Times* best sellers list, the movie version of the book has arrived with all the flash and dazzle Hollywood could muster.

What has made the book so famous is not the trite and perfunctory dialogue; nor is it the plot with holes big enough to fly a plane through; nor is it the cleverness of the puzzles and word games (who doesn't like a good cryptogram, sudoku or crossword puzzle?). What has made the *DaVinci Code* a bibliophile's best buy is the beguiling brew that the author offers. It discusses forbidden topics and salacious stories. Through the literary device of suspension of belief, the reader is invited into a world of veiled innuendoes, insidious lies and seemingly credible half-truths. The problem for some has been that they fail to suspend the suspension of belief and then they ask questions that have little or no basis in reality.

The titillation that thrives in the *DaVinci Code* centers on three issues: That Jesus had relations with Mary Magdalene and these relations resulted in an heir to the legacy of Jesus; that the Catholic Church (or better, Opus Dei) is bent on stopping this secret from emerging; that the members of the Priory of Sion are the true believers. In some respects these seem to be new challenges to believers; but as Plato said in 400 BC: there is nothing new under the sun. As the discovery, translation and publication of the *Gospel of*

Judas have shown, these are issues that have plagued humanity since the founding of Christianity.

It is not the plot or the themes of the *DaVinci Code* that intrigue; rather, it is what they stand for that is troubling. Dan Brown, the author of the novel, has struck upon some ideas that have always inveigled, enticed and tempted readers for centuries. These are: the finding of faults in heroes, the shell game of truth and the shaking of faith. To the graduates, I propose that these three challenges are not only present in this book, but will be the same challenges you will face every day of your life. My hope is that the education of St. Augustine Prep has prepared you to handle these challenges and given you the wisdom you will need to refute these machinations.

What intrigues many about the story line of the book is that Jesus may have been much more human than was thought possible. For some, if Jesus can be knocked off his pedestal just ever so much then sinful human beings don't look so bad. For many, it would be nice to know that Jesus gave into carnal temptations; it makes the rest of humanity seem a wee bit better than they are. This plot detail is as malicious as it is false. By making Jesus a little less than divine, we make ourselves a lot less human. By soiling the image of the Son of God, we become filthy in the process. The temptation to tear down those who are on top is nothing other than our own inability to deal with our imperfections.

Today's second reading and Gospel refer to God and love. It is important to note that the word is "love" and not "lust." What God is all about is sacrifice – the essence of love. Lust, which is what the *DaVinci Code* deals in, is all about selfishness, not sacrifice. God and for that matter, Jesus, is love and sacrifice; not lust and selfishness.

As you graduates go through life, never shrink from becoming the hero and doing the right. There are those who will attack you for it and you must remember it is not their lack of belief in what was done; rather, it is their self-perceived inadequacy that causes them to act in jealousy. Our world needs heroes and it needs leaders. You have been given the knowledge you will need to do what is right for the common good, to make sacrifices and to love. Do not be dissuaded from the task that lies before you.

The second way in which the *DaVinci Code* intrigues its readers is with the shell game of truth that is played every day in every way. There are so many voices from so many sources that vie for your attention and they want you to believe them. A lie will live in the dark as long as you are willing to believe it. As soon as it is exposed to the light of Truth, it will vanish as all shadows do. In the *DaVinci Code*, Lee Tebbing, who himself is a liar and a fraud, is the source of most of the troubling tales. He takes rumors as facts, distortions as gospels and outright fantasies as bedrock beliefs. This sounds a lot like Scientology. (Maybe Tom Cruise should have starred in the *DaVinci Code*. He would have felt right at home.) As you graduates march into the world, there will be many sources vying for your attention and allegiance. Some will ask you to believe in the gospel of yourself: don't worry about others; think only of yourself. Some will espouse the theory that it is only a crime if you get caught. Others will try to teach you that there are greater goods than God and family. You know better. You have learned about *Veritas*, about Truth. If what you do and what you think does not acknowledge God and love of neighbor, then it is a lie. Expose competing ideas to the light of Truth and you will never live in the shadow lands.

Lastly, the *DaVinci Code* has shaken the faith of some. In reality, it has just

become a convenient excuse for what was already untenable. Do not put yourselves in a position to be weak in faith. For many this is done because they dislike cognitive dissonance – the holding of two values systems that are at odds with each other. Because of their weakness, people want a life of licentiousness and leniency. It is difficult to believe in God and at the same time live a life of unbridled immorality. What many have done is to abandon belief so that they can sooth their consciences. They don't want the nagging that belief brings. They want to be selfish and think that what they want is really what they need; they prefer lust to love. Faith exposes this as a lie and a destructive deception. In the *DaVinci Code*, the Priory of Sion wants to live by its own rules. It is a sham. Only belief in God will lead to life. As you graduates depart from these hallowed halls of Brotherhood, you will realize that you cannot avoid coming to terms with belief in God forever. Even though it may be convenient now to think that Church and religion are passé; it is these institutions that will keep you grounded and focused and allow you to realize your full potential.

Recognize the hype and hysteria of the *DaVinci Code* for what it is. It is the cry of our times about dissatisfaction with our very selves. As Christian Gentlemen, as graduates of St. Augustine Prep you know what remedy to bring to this world. Choose Truth over deception, Unity over discord and Love over lust. Bring the Brotherhood to shine in dark places and the Light of Truth will illuminate all. God Bless you all.