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### **Service of Induction: *Cum Laude* Society**

Recently, my wife and I visited the Country Music Hall of Fame. Julie and I were in Nashville to celebrate our thirty-fifth wedding anniversary, because the Temptations were playing at Ryman auditorium and our first date was a Temptations concert at Barton Coliseum our sophomore year in high school. So we went to Nashville, saw the Temps for old times' sake, and then checked out the Country Music Hall of Fame, which this year is celebrating Patsy Cline.

Have you heard of Patsy Cline?

Then allow me to introduce you, because you may need her someday when your heart is breaking. Patsy sang love songs—"Faded Love," "I Fall to Pieces," "Sweet Dreams (of You)"—in a deep, rich alto. Tragically, she died young. It was March 3, 1963. Flying through a thunderstorm, her small airplane went down and crashed in a field near Camden, Tennessee.

We loved the Country Music Hall of Fame, which was built to honor excellence in twangy music.

There are seasons in a high school student's life. Our Episcopal Collegiate seniors now enter their season of awards and recognition.

Let's think on that, for just a moment, using two old, philosophic terms: "potential" and "actual." Potential is what might take place. Actual is what does take place, or has. When you arrive at Episcopal Collegiate, first day, first year, your school career is pure potential. That first day, you might make a friend at lunch. Sophomore year, you might ask your future wife or husband for a date. You might excel.

"Excel at what?" you ask. At being funny maybe, or singing love songs, or hitting free throws in the clutch, or in being brave, or kind. Many and varied are the forms of potential excellence in high school.

Four years ago, six Episcopal Collegiate students—Mimi Ederle, Conley Hurst, Blair Johnston, Sonia Helen Pascale, Jennifer Saccente, and Jonny Schulz—sat down at their desks and opened their books in the first class, on the first day of ninth grade. They had potential to excel as students, "scholars." We honor them this morning because what might have happened, did.

"Cum Laude" means "with honors." The "*Cum Laude* Society" was founded in 1906 to honor excellence in careful thinking.

Aristotle, the philosopher, said that humans are “rational animals.” As animals, we have much in common with, for example, dogs. But just as dogs are distinct from us for their keener sense of smell, among animals humans are distinct for our ability to reason. We are animals that think.

Thinking is important. Imagine yourself in the position of Patsy Cline’s manager and pilot, Randy Hughes. It is March 3, 1963. The weather is stormy. Your star, missing her young children, is anxious to get home. Two instincts are at odds: maternal love and fear of storms. As an animal, you feel both instincts in your blood and bones. But you also have the human ability to reason. As a pilot, you understand the weather and appreciate the risks. To fly or not is your decision. Think!

A century ago, strenuous and careful thought enabled humankind to fly. We’d been jealous of the birds. How do they get up there? We saw that they have wings. But what about a wing would lift something off the ground? Think!

For a long time, I thought Bernoulli’s principle explained it. Jacob Bernoulli, a 17<sup>th</sup> century physicist, proved that pressure varies with the speed of motion: more speed means less pressure. If a wing were shaped so that air flowing across the top must travel further, therefore faster, than air moving along the bottom, that would lift it. Right?

That’s what I was taught in pilot’s ground school. It solved the problem for me—until I saw the movie *Flight* and marveled at a jet flying upside down. On Bernoulli’s principle, what lifts a wing turned upside down? I’m hoping one of our *Cum Laude* inductees might explain that to me this morning after chapel.

In the recipe for academic excellence, reasoning ability is one of three indispensable ingredients. The other two are work and time. My ninth grade Kent School teacher William Armstrong authored several books. One was the children’s novel, *Sounder*. Another very different book was titled simply: *Study is Hard Work*. It is hard work and it does take time.

In the two hours it may take you to absorb Bernoulli’s principle, you might rather have been playing Madden NFL, or watching *Pitch Perfect*.

Suppose that in American History class you are considering problems in democracy. Your teacher raises a question that is currently before the Supreme Court of the United States. Under the U.S. Constitution, do gay and lesbian couples have a right to marry?

Let’s think carefully about the work involved in answering that question.

We would need to learn some science, concerning the biology and psychology of sexual orientation; some history, because the argument favoring a constitutional right for gays to marry often draws an historical analogy between the legal status of

lesbians and gays today and the situation sixty years ago of African Americans; some logic, to assess the strengths and weaknesses inherent to such historical comparisons; and some political science, appropriately including the American founders' theories of divided government, because in the cases now before the Court two different kinds of question are at issue: (1) Should gays have the legal right to marry? and: (2) Who—voters, representatives, or courts—holds the power to decide?

Birds and dogs can't think about these questions. Human beings can!

This is why, in 1906, the *Cum Laude* Society was formed.

The society has a motto: "Arête, Diké, Timé"—excellence, justice, honor.

Thinking, we may wonder: "What is excellent, honorable, and just?"

The society elaborates, explaining that "areté includes the concept of excellence in the moral sense. Diké includes the concept of what is suitable and appropriate as well as just. Timé includes the concept of dignity and truth, as well as honor."

That means excellence, with kindness, then; justice that says please and thank you, and doesn't drive and drink; honor in truthfulness and quiet strength.

Arête, Diké, Timé: good stuff!

Living into those meanings draws out some of the finest potentialities in human nature. Now please join me in again congratulating Mimi Ederle, Conley Hurst, Blair Johnston, Sonia Helen Pascale, Jennifer Saccente, and Jonny Schulz, who have so very ably drawn from their potential and are bringing it to life.