

Dear students, parents, tutors, dear Headmaster Brown,

It is an extreme honour for me to stand here in front of you in the Bethlehem Chapel, a place marked by Mr. Jan Hus, fighter for justice, truth, the freedom of opinion, thought and expression.

When I was approached by Ms. Švejsová from the English College in Prague to be the guest of honour at this graduation ceremony, I felt that I must have been mistaken with someone else. Someone older, with more life experience. On a second thought, I realised it has been already twenty-one years since my own graduation. And a lot has happened since. Personally – I have a family of five, and professionally, I wish that I'm not done yet, since I still have a lot of dreams and goals 😊

Nevertheless, however I try to put myself into the shoes of a wise, decent and experienced person, it still remains a huge challenge to address you, this year's ECP graduates, on life and professional challenges.

Let me thus share at least two rules that I keep on reminding myself:

- **Rule one:** life - whether we want it or not – is not a straight line. It is full of curves and hiccups; the key is to have a vision, towards which you aim, while enjoying the journey
- **Rule two:** there is only a limited extent to which we, as human beings, are in control of lives: our destinies depend pretty much on where and when we are born, in what circumstances we are brought up, whom we meet, what we learn.

The fact that you, dear graduates, find yourselves in this place and time means that you have been extremely lucky. To have the parents you have, to have had the chance to attend one of the very best European schools.

To illustrate how things could have taken a different shape, let me read a short essay from Marcello D'Orta's book "I'll manage that: 60 essays by children of Naples (Italy)".

This essay was written by a pupil of an elementary school

Theme: Describe your School

"Our school is old, half collapsed, its walls are all gone. The classrooms are dirty, without blackboards, the desks are all broken. When you pull out the drawers at the teacher's desk, spiders come out. The toilets are all broken, the taps are leaking, the toilets stink.

The janitors, in charge of the maintenance, do nothing from morning till night, the headmaster is a moron and can't manage the school. He's scared of the mothers, they complain all the time and of the janitor saying they're criminals.

In my school, it's the janitor who calls the shots. The janitor is a bit of a "Camorista" (mafia guy/gangster), and everyone trembles like a leaf of him. Our teacher loathes him.

Personally, I think I've been attending our school for at least a thousand years. Kids are rude, they pee in the sink, they clog the toilets. Our school is a living hell."

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I guess you got the point that you're rather the lucky ones. On that note, please allow me to ask you to remember **two key takeaways**.

First, bear in mind that we are all privileged to be living a decent life in Central Europe, harvesting fruit after many before us have fought for the democracy we have. Witnessing the degeneration of human rights globally but also in our neighbouring countries, I kindly ask you to be active citizens.

To be the agents of change – or at least the agents of maintenance of what we have, if you will. The rule of law, the liberal democracy based on respect and protection of all human rights for all without distinction based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or any other identity.

These are the values which we must cherish and preserve whatever it takes, whatever professional path we step on.

Second – and allow me to be quite personal here – **be grateful to your parents and grandparents**. Without them you'd hardly be where you are. My own grandmother who taught me English from the age of 6 and my father who brought me up and supported me throughout my studies, here and abroad, have both passed away during the past two years. And I feel I have never expressed enough my gratitude for their limitless care.

Don't wait until it's too late to show your love, to thank them. They deserve it.

You have indeed reached a milestone and surely, **be proud of it!** Let me guess. You are happy to have passed it and, at the same time, stressed about what comes next.

My advice to you is this: don't you worry, you'll be just fine! Take one step at a time and you will succeed. The ECP has prepared you more than well.

Dear Graduates, namely students of **6A – Aqua, 6B – Ignis, 6C – Terra, and 6D - Ventus**

I wish you all the best **in** – as your Headmaster Nigel Brown has framed it – **the second age of freedom**.

Be who you want to be, the world is all yours.

Mgr. Viktor Kunderák, Ph.D., E.M.A.

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