

Saying farewell to seniors is an emotional time. Some close friends will find it hard to say goodbye, and some not-so-close friends will be happy to say goodbye. But the end of a school year almost always means the end of some relationships. Many friendships will continue, though in a different way. You'll always have electronic communication, but you won't always have personal presence, and there really is a difference. When close friends are with one another, they create their own electricity, and nothing can ever replace it.

The end of the year means loss, but it also means passage. It is a time when the person you have become prepares you for the person you will next be.

Seniors, you have given a terrific example through your accomplishments. You have devoted yourselves to prayer and service. You have become familiar with agencies in Kansas City that provide food for the hungry, care for the elderly, jobs for the unemployed, and companionship for the lonely. You have excelled in studies at school and in sports at State. You have won competitions in art, music, and academic knowledge. You are more capable of giving something wonderful to others – capable of giving them yourself.

Your experience was foreshadowed in today's first reading from Acts of the Apostles. In the story, Paul has been visiting Ephesus for three years. He was preaching Jesus Christ, and helping people commit themselves to the Christian way of life. Now it was time for him to leave. In those days, when you left, you really left. He was able to write a letter to the Ephesians, but he would never see them again. They all knew it, and they embraced and kissed one other in one of the saddest farewells reported in the bible. Paul gives them some advice: Watch over one another, but also watch over yourselves. God acquired this flock of believers through the shedding of the blood of his only son. It was a huge price. Don't mess it up. After I go, Paul says, savage wolves will come among you, and people from within this group will pervert the truth. Paul's departure was going to be a challenge for them, because he would no longer be there to help them along when they were tempted to stray.

So he gives them one last piece of advice. He quotes something that Jesus said. And it's a good thing Paul quoted this in his speech, and that Luke wrote it down, because it does not appear anywhere else. It's the only saying of Jesus that does not appear in any of the four gospels. It shows up only here in Acts of the Apostles. You know these words very well; and Paul used them to say goodbye. Here they are: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Your theme for this year has been "Love tenderly". Not be loved tenderly. Everyone seeks to be loved, but it is more important to give love; it is more blessed to give than to receive. As you say your goodbyes today, remember the words of Paul. Shed a few tears. But be strong. Live what you have learned; give what you are.