

The engaged couples who come to St. Regis for marriage preparation ask the church to be part of their union. Frequently I learn that one or both partners haven't been to church in years. When I ask why they stopped, the typical response is, "When I got to high school I went through a period of rebellion."

The church stands for a lot of good things that kids believe in too. We stand for faith in God, stable friendships, helpful attitudes, the betterment of society, and the importance of family. But when kids go through high school, they need independence. They need the opportunity to define for themselves who they are. To do that they detach themselves from some of the systems that helped them grow. They remove the training wheels off the bicycle of their life.

A growing child needs independence, but church is not like training wheels. Church is like the gears, the sprockets and the very wheels that make a bike go. In their zeal for independence, kids sometimes rebel against the wrong things. They rebel against the very structures that give them life, meaning, and freedom.

Rebellion can be great. I encourage kids to rebel. I encourage adults to rebel. There is much in our society that deserves a good rebellion: legislation that favors the rich and punishes the poor, the appropriation of funds for weapons of defense instead of the world's hungry, materialism that creates an insatiable appetite to own things and a disregard for the feeble and unemployed, the production of disposable items that fosters a spirit of disposable relationships, racism that disguises itself as mobility, the glorification of sports and the marginalization of the arts, the cult of selfishness and the abandonment of religion. If kids gotta rebel, why can't they rebel against some of that? Why not rebel against wardrobe, greed, television, and pornography? We could use a good rebellion against whatever causes evil.

At graduation time on James A. Reed Road this year we have faced incidents concerning vandalism, drugs, and violence. It tells me that we still have a long way to go to learn the most fundamental teaching of Catholic schools: the ability to tell right from wrong.

Jesus warned his disciples at the Last Supper that "the ruler of this world is coming." He refers to the influence of evil. He goes on to tell his disciples that this ruler has no power over him. Jesus offers his disciples peace, not as the world gives it. Not the false peace of commercialism, weaponry, and good looks. But the true peace of faith, hope, and charity.

Graduates, of all the lessons you've learned here at St. Regis, the one I hope you've learned the best is right from wrong. Nurture that teaching. Let it grow within you. Let your high school years be a time in which you grow physically, mentally, and spiritually. When the day comes that any of you talks to a minister about your upcoming marriage, I dream that you'll be able to say, "When I was in high school, I went through a period of rebellion. And I made the world a better place because I stayed close to Jesus and I would not tolerate the influence of evil around me." Be able to say it, that you have found peace.