



Mount Aloysius College
2014 Fall Honors Lecture
October 16, 2014
Remarks of President Tom Foley

Mount Aloysius is fairly unusual in the ranks of higher education institutions in that we choose a theme each year and try to coordinate Orientation, the Connections courses, our Speakers Series and other events around that single idea. Our theme this year is a simple one, “The Good Life.”

This is our fourth cut already this semester on The Good life.

- **At Convocation**, Father Byron told us in no uncertain terms that The Good Life is a “life lived generously in the service of others,” and cited his nine principles from the letters from Paul in the gospel—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- **At Orientation** and in your Connections classes some of you have wrestled with all manner of lists related to the good life—top ten lists of secrets to the good life compiled by everyone from Thomas Jefferson to the Pope, from the WSJ to Mahatma Gandhi.
- **In her Mercy Week lecture**, Sheila Carney used poetry and prose to describe two lives well-lived—Catherine McAuley in Ireland and Frances Warde here in America—two women who were prime examples of how to lead The Good Life.
- **In his All College Liturgy remarks**, Father Mark told us what it isn’t when he reminded us that we did not choose as our theme, “The Easy Life” or “The Fun Life,” we chose “The Good Life,” with all its inherent challenges.

And at this time in our approach to the theme, it may be far easier for us to identify what isn’t The Good Life, and I won’t resist the temptation. It’s not fame, or wealth, or celebrity or even “celebrity” (which apparently means being famous “for all the wrong reasons”). In Gandhi’s pursuit of peace, he identified a litany of pernicious, problematic and destructive traits that he viewed as the polar opposite of The Good Life. His *Seven Social Sins* included: wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity, knowledge without character, politics without principle, commerce without morality, and worship without sacrifice.

So today is our fifth cut, our fifth chance at the “reset” button, as it were, and today’s “cut”—our Fall Honors Lecture—is aimed at a short course on the long history of intellectual and moral thought on the idea of The Good Life—“Pursuits of Happiness: from Aristotle to America” by Dr. Larry Jackson.

Before I formally introduce Dr. Jackson, I want to say something about the idea of *reset buttons* as we all struggle to define and live “The Good Life.”

Two months ago, I saw the movie *Groundhog Day, again*, with Bill Murray in the lead role. It’s an entertaining morality play, as Murray fumbles his way through a succession of do-overs—during which he relives his Groundhog Day in our own Punxsutawney PA over and over again.

In the course of re-orchestrating this “day in his life,” Murray evolves from an egocentric jerk into a much more complete human being who appreciates the goodness of others and yearns to replicate it himself.

I am not sure we will get many chances to replay anything in our lives until we get it perfect. But I do believe there is a metaphor in the movie for all of us in this Mount Aloysius year of “The Good Life.” I think the real point is that when Murray got the chance to hit that reset button over and over, he ultimately realized that his path to The Good Life is through goodness in a moral sense, not goods in the material way.

Our oldest son Tom says that the lesson of Murray’s fable is that the more you give, the more you get. Part of the good life for each of us lies in our interactions with others and how much of our happiness we share. And maybe that is the calculus of happiness, a rationale well-known to ancient philosophers and familiar to founding fathers but distant to us as we speed ever faster into the future.

Well, we are going to let you hit that reset button each time we schedule an event that explores the idea of “The Good Life.” And it is up to us to take that discussion one step further, to plumb our own depths and find our way to, if not true happiness, at least our own version of a good life and a meaningful existence.

Today, we get a chance at that reset button thanks to the genius and the talent of Dr. Larry Jackson. On paper, Dr. Jackson is a Ph.D. in Philosophy who serves as the Director for Global Academic Planning for one of the leading universities on the planet—NYU, led by its highly regarded President John Sexton, whose vision is matched only by the power of his will.

Dr. Jackson is responsible for curriculum planning and development at NYU’s 11 global sites and two portal campuses. He is also a frequent lecturer, author and presenter, and has had his work published recently by the *New School for Social Research* and by the collaborative *American Forms of Poetry*. He has lectured on such diverse topics as “The Politics of Poetic Spaces” and “The Meaning of Frame: Politicizing Derrida’s Aesthetics.”

This lecture is his fourth event so far at Mount Aloysius, and he only got here at 11:30 last night. At breakfast, he managed to fit Descartes, Kant, Hobbes, Rousseau, Augustine, Plato, politics, Alex Rodriguez and the Brooklyn Dodgers into a fascinating conversation with Drs. Dragani and Rohlf and eight of our students. At ten, Dean Zukowski, Professors Garmen, Boyce and Kisel and about 40 of our nursing students participated in his Socratic lecture on tragic choices in the health care industry (and other topics).

Beginning at noon, he spent ninety minutes with our College Technology Committee, in a conversation led by Senior Vice President Campbell, where he shared his own insights on technology in the global classrooms, for which he is responsible, and picked the brains of our first-rate committee on the subject.

So, Larry has been busy already today, but that is nothing new for him. Because the most interesting thing about our Fall Honors lecturer for 2014 is that he is very much like most of you—he is a native Pennsylvanian who is hard working to a fault, who is interested and informed on a wide range of topics—philosophical or otherwise—and who is the first in his family to go to college, let alone achieve a Ph.D.

And he is a risk taker. When I traveled to Abu Dhabi last year with Larry, he was right next to me when we rode a 15 foot high camel in the desert, played with a deadly falcon and tried to match wits with his boss.

Larry, we are delighted that you took the risk of that treacherous drive last night from NYC to be here with us today. Let me invite you now to deliver the 2014 Mount Aloysius Fall Honors Lecture.