

## INSPIRATION

You can't imagine how difficult it has been for me to think of something of value to say to you today. Preparing my thoughts for this very special occasion in our lives has been far more challenging, believe you me, than trying to write a speech or a lecture for a community -imagined or real- of academic scholars.

So, what did I come up with? What have I got to tell you?

I've already dropped a hint, even though it was unintentional. But let me elaborate: one thing I discovered when I grew older and re-visited my childhood haunts in the back-garden of my family house after a long period of absence was how free, bold and spontaneous I must have been when I was younger, and how timid, calculating and fearful I had become in my older age. My "eye-opener" in this discovery was simple. It was my refusal now to retry -even for memory's sake- the same jumps and climbs in the garden I was used to making as a matter of routine in the early years of my life.

I know that, on unique occasions such as the one we're now celebrating, we must all dress up. I still remember the special suit I proudly wore for my own graduation from high-school. I have a picture. In time, I have come to realize that this picture contains a hidden secret, a mystery. It shows me with a few of my class-mates standing there, grinning widely, delicately clutching our certificates in our hands, staring as though from high above in the clouds, at the invisible cameraman standing or kneeling before us. Whenever I now look at the picture, I am partly moved by the beautiful memories it brings back. But I am also partly struck by a terrifying feeling that it was

precisely then, at that regimented moment, when we had all stood there quite still, as if in a freeze, having tied ourselves up in those starched collars and dark-lined suits, that Narnia's Evil Ice Queen slipped into our lives, capturing and freezing our souls. Until then, we had been masters of our playgrounds, measuring distances as we pleased, climbing trees and jumping freely. Since then, as if jacketed in later life in our inner souls by the very suits we wore then, we had become prisoners of the Ice-Queen's measures and standards, many of us unable to break free.

My mention of Narnia should warn you that I am a believer in magic. You can call it political magic, if the subject is politics; or the magic of physics and engineering, if the subject is shapes, distances or measures. But it is magic all the same. The sign of magicians is that they defy what appears to be a starched, frozen, or iced reality. Magicians are the enemies of the Ice Queen. They make things move, and therefore happen. Think of the Prime Mover. First you think there is nothing before you. Then there is. Or, first you believe there is a mountain standing in your way. Then you simply make it disappear. You have all probably come across that famous Cartesian line, cogito ergo sum- I think, therefore I am. One day, on your way back home from school, some of you were discussing an assignment you were given in one of your wonderful classes, on how sense data and knowledge are related. That day, those of you sitting in the car will recall, I was the driver. At the time, another line crossed my mind, which I desisted from confusing you with, but which I will now say. The line is: I think, therefore there is. Cogito, ergo est. In other words, I can make the world be how I want it. I am not a receptor, registering information. I am an actor, a designer, a maker. The downside of this, we must never fail to remind ourselves, is that the world, whenever it stinks, happens to do so exactly

because of us. And the beauty of it is, we can always make the world a more beautiful place than it is! Imagine, then, the huge responsibility we all bear!

For good reason, graduating from high school feels like crossing a threshold. The initiation ceremony, culminating the early years of one's life, may feel like throwing the doors wide open to the world. One part of the world that one can now almost feel like a physical solid under the soles of one's feet is the world of being "of age", of now being "a grown-up", on a level, so to speak, with the next streetwalker. It is therefore exactly here, at this spot in time-space, that one may begin to be tempted by the Ice-Queen's lie that the world is frozen in the state one finds it, that to be a grown-up is simply to be adept at perceiving and knowing it, and that to be brilliant is precisely and literally to be that, that is, to be a shining receptor of sense-data. It is here, then, that one may risk becoming a puppet, a prisoner of the world rather than a maker of it -which, if we're made in the image of God, we have the power to be. And it is exactly now, therefore, on this particular occasion, that I feel I should warn you not to leave your powers of magic, your faith in yourselves, in what you can do, in the good you can do, behind.

Always remember, you can always jump, and climb.

But when you decide you want to fly, I must advise you –on pain of being sued later- to use an aeroplane.

My dear students, young ladies and lads –mostly young ladies that I can make out, actually, lucky lads- Avi, Kayra, Leen, Lucy, magda, mara, marianna, morea, mpho, Vivi, and, of course, last but not least, Nazzouhti, that is, my nuz: Stay connected, I beg, and as the Jedi reminds you, to the power within you, because with it, you can move mountains, but without it, you can become just another piece of earth.

Congratulations to us all, and let this day forever be a day of celebrations!!