

Sacred Heart School Graduation Message 2017: In the American South, Southerners revere the memory of the late Hank Williams (1923-53), a legendary country music recording artist, and, arguably, the greatest Country-Western entertainer of the last century. His enormously successful career was tragically cut short by a premature death at the young age of thirty. Sixty plus years after his death, his name is remarkably one the most recognizable in many sectors of our country. His hard earned fame has stood the test of time.

Sometime after his death, a close, personal friend remarked that Hank was very ambitious early in his career. His sole objective was to reach the pinnacle of the country-music world. In the competitive world of music, his efforts paid off. He achieved his personal goal. He reached the top rung of the ladder. He was king! But when he got there, he made a shocking discovery. He realized that there was nothing there... only a gigantic void. Isolated and alone, he then realized that everything he truly desired and ever wanted in life was back from whence he came. His simple country roots afforded him more joy and meaning than the illusory fame of a celebrity.

Today, the prospect of material success can be very alluring for the unsuspecting young man or woman. Hank Williams learned a painful lesson: it is no guarantee of unending joy or deep satisfaction in life. Today, students are told that the whole point of education is to prepare them for a successful career. "Nothing succeeds like success" is a well known proverb. In our society, the measure of success can be summed up in three words: wealth, power and fame. Yet worldly success can never succeed in doing what it promises it can do. In the words of Professor Donald Demarco, "It flatters our ego, arouses our greed, awakens our expectations, but fails to satisfy our deeper, more human needs".

I would like to make the case that the most successful man who ever lived was Jesus of Nazareth. And it is not because his life was a success. Far from it! By the secular standards of the world in which he lived, he was an abject failure. After all, he was abandoned by his disciples and friends, abused by an angry mob, tormented by his captors and executed among thieves. Worse still, he died a shameful death on the cross, a fate reserved for slaves and other outcasts.

Nevertheless, he inspired countless others to live their lives in imitation of his love. "This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you." (Jn. 15:34) He made it abundantly clear that if love is not the center of our life, we cannot choose anything but loneliness, frustration and sadness. The realism and sheer magic of love is convincingly expressed in its successful healing of broken lives and in the infectious joy it brings to those who live by it. That was one of Our Lord's legacies, and an admirable one it is for us who live in the Twenty-first Century.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was once asked by a journalist if she considered herself a failure as a missionary of Christ because she had very few converts to show for all her labors. "But I am not called to be successful", Mother Teresa protested, "only faithful".

By the yardstick of the secular world, she was a dismal failure because the unbelieving world thinks only in terms of numbers and statistics, hardly the barometer of a beautiful soul. By the standard of the gospel of love incarnated by Christ, she was an exemplary witness of the love of Jesus for all people, regardless of their color or creed. And that is all that truly matters.

Amen!