Members of the class of 2012, I am very proud to be here with you today on this beautiful campus and dynamic university. You have all had four years of formation, education and advice. You have learned much that will prepare you to enter the world and the workforce. Your family and friends are rightly proud of what you have accomplished.

But before you take that next step on life’s journey, allow me to add to what you have learned with the hope that this last piece of advice you hear before you graduate will help you achieve a successful career — and more importantly — a life worth living.

Most of you will go into the business world. Some of you will go into government, and others into education or the non-profit sector. I have had the benefit of working in all of those sectors — from the White House to the university classroom to the corporate boardroom, to the frontlines of charity in places like Haiti.

In each case, I have seen the same, consistent secret to success. And that secret is this: success is best built on a foundation of honesty and integrity. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. summed up the idea best when he said: “The time is always right to do what is right.”

I have seen this first hand in every sector in which I have worked.
And the father of free market economics himself took note of this. Adam Smith was no Gordon Gekko.

He wrote his second book on economics—his first book was on ethics. In it, he pointed out that honesty and integrity are beneficial in every walk of life. People like to associate and do business with honest people.

And I would add, that people prefer to marry, vote for, learn from and work with an honest person as well.

Businesses themselves are neither good nor bad. They can’t make decisions. But their executives and employees do. And as a result, your actions in life will affect not only those in your immediate circle, but the wider economic system as well.

Businesses with an ethical foundation are more successful in the long run than comparable businesses without one.

Let me give you just a couple of examples from my own experience. As CEO of a Fortune 1000 insurer, I have seen our sustainable investment strategy prove superior to the quick profit strategies that brought on the economic downturn.

As the economy collapsed I have also seen our portfolio grow, and I have seen our company gain strength relative to its industry. It’s not that our people are so much smarter than the people working somewhere else.

It is simply that our corporate culture insists that we treat people ethically.

We look at those who trust us with their money as people whose trust we need to earn and whose money we need to protect.
I know each of you, in your personal relationships and among your friends, would like to be known as honest and trustworthy. Honest behavior belongs in your personal life. But don’t let it end there. Bring the same ethical principles you practice at home with you to work.

As you prepare to enter the workforce always remember that what is most important about you is not your skills — what is most important about you is you: your character, your integrity, your ability to take risk, your willingness to make hard decisions and your determination to live by them.

And I would offer you one more piece of advice that as a graduate of this great university will make you different.

Perhaps it is not too much of a stretch today on Mother’s Day to remember the story from the Bible of King Solomon, who when confronted with two women both claiming to be the mother of the same child offered to cut the baby into two pieces and give each woman half.

Immediately the real mother, intent only to save her child rushed forward to deny the child and thus save its life.

King Solomon had just found the real mother.

We know that Solomon had asked the Lord for “an understanding heart” so that he might rule his people wisely and with justice. (1Kings 3:9)

And because he asked for this, and not for wealth or a long life the Lord granted his request.
Notice that Solomon did not ask for great intelligence or great knowledge. He asked for something even greater—something that effected who he was as a person in his entirety.

He asked for “an understanding heart.”

And I suspect that it was her heart and not her ability to think on her feet that allowed that mother in the Bible to save her child.

Today, the world needs more than ever, honest and trustworthy people who know that their actions always have consequences, and that they have the choice to leave the world a better place than they found it.

But because of what you have learned in this university you can bring the world something it needs even more urgently.

You too can bring to the world an “understanding heart.”

You can bring to the world “a heart that” in the words of Pope Benedict XVI, “sees where love is needed and acts appropriately.”

It is this “understanding heart” that tells us that we are our brother’s keeper and tells us also who our brother is.

It is this understanding heart that tells us that whether we are in business or in any activity of our life that our brother or sister may never be exploited, manipulated or taken advantage of.

If we seek to have this heart then each of us will draw closer to the great promise of this university.
And we will draw closer to the heart of the one who is recognized in this university’s name and in whose heart every understanding heart is already in some way united.

Again, congratulations to each of you and thank you very much.