

Father Gregory Boyle
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Thank you very much. It's an honor to be with you, Class of 2014.

The poet, Mary Oliver, writes there are some things you can't reach, but you can reach out to them. And all day long what we reach out for, of course, I think is the creation of a community of kinship such that God in fact might recognize it. No kinship, no peace. No kinship, no justice. No matter how singularly focused we may well be on those worthy goals, if there isn't an undergirding sense of kinship, it can't happen for it is certainly true, I think, that we've forgotten that we belong to each other. So we stand against forgetting that, for there's an idea that has taken root in the world. It's at the root of all that's wrong with it, and the idea would be this: that there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives.

How do we stand against that? I suspect that if kinship was our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice, we would be celebrating it.

So it's been the privilege of my life for 30 years to work with gang members, and they've taught me everything of value, of which I am so grateful. But the last couple of years, they've taught me how to text. And I'm so grateful to them. I find that it sure beats the heck out of actually talking to people, and I'm pretty dexterous at it. You know, LOL and OMG and BTW, and the homies have taught me a new one -- OHN, which apparently stands for "oh hell no." And I have been using that one kind a bit lately.

So there I am in a car with two older *vatos*, Manuel and Poncho, and they do a variety of things at Homeboy Industries. They're going to help me give a talk, so we're driving away at 9:00 in the morning. Manuel in the front seat gets an incoming, and he reads the text to himself and he chuckles. And I said, "What is it?" He goes, "Oh, it's dumb. It's from Snoopy back at the office." I had just seen Snoopy. Snoopy gave me a big *abrazote* as the day was beginning. Snoopy and Manuel work together in the clock-in room where they clock in hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of gang members.

I said, "Well, what's he saying?" He goes, "Oh, it's dumb. Hang on a second. 'Hey dog, it's me, Snoops. Yeah, they got my ass locked up in county jail. They're charging me with being the ugliest *vato* in America. You have to come down right now, show them they got the wrong guy.'"

But we died laughing. Then I realized that Manuel and Snoopy are enemies. They're from rival gangs. They used to shoot bullets at each other. Now they shoot text messages. And there's a word for that, and the word is kinship. How do we obliterate once and for all the illusion that we are separate, that there is an "us" and a "them"?

All of us are called to move beyond this place to something larger. What Martin Luther King says about a church could well be said of your time here at Pomona. It's not the place you've come to, it's the place you go from. And you go from here to imagine together a circle of compassion and then imagine nobody standing outside of it. And you choose to dismantle the barriers that exclude, and you're inching your way always out to the margins. And if you check under your feet, the margins are getting erased because you've chosen to stand there with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless, with those whose dignity has been denied and those whose burdens are more than they can bear.

You are privileged to be able to stand with the easily despised and the readily left out, with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop, and with the disposable, so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away. The measure of your compassion lies not in your service of those on the margins, but in your willingness to see yourselves in kinship with them.

Maybe there are some things we can't reach, but we can reach out to them, and all day long Pomona is not the place you have come to, it's always been the place you'll go from. And you go from here to create a community of kinship such that God in fact might recognize it. And good luck and God bless Class of 2014. Thank you.

About Father Gregory Boyle

Father Gregory Boyle is the founder of Homeboy Industries, the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and reentry program in the United States. He is the author of the award-winning and critically-acclaimed *New York Times* bestselling book *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*. He has served on the California State Commission for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Youth Gang Center Board and the Attorney General's Defending Childhood Task Force. Among the numerous honors he has received are the California Peace Prize and the Civic Medal of Honor.