Graduation Day of Princeton College

Supernews, 4th, Teachers, Students (or Parents)

Today is the special day of the Form 5 Graduates, and I wish to address my remarks to them.

F5 Graduates

Today you will be leaving behind not only your old school, but your childhood, because now you are adults, and have to live in an adult world. Even if you continue your studies, it will be different from school, because now you have to organise your time and be more self-dependent in your studies. And if you are not going to continue studying, you will be accepted in your family and in society as a breadwinner.

It is not easy to adapt to this big change in life. You may look back and wish you had your schoolday chances all over again, so that you might get better results and do something different. Or you may look back and feel that you always did your best, and you wish you could live those happy days all over again.

But we all have to realise that there is no way to go back into the past. We all have to look to the future, and try to learn from our past mistakes.
I have lived in this adult world for a great number of years, and the more I see of our society, the more I realise that academic success really means only an entry ticket to a career, to our life's work. It is like buying a ticket for a show. There is no value in the ticket itself, except that it permits us to enter for the show. Whether or not we enjoy the show depends upon whether we choose well, and whether we make up our minds to enjoy what we see. The certificates we obtain are just like the tickets that give us the right to enter. Once we have entered our career, our success and happiness depend upon ourselves, our purposes, our motives.

I believe that too many people today consider it their motive to make money. I believe that this is a big mistake. I heard recently of two Hong Kong girls studying to be doctors in England. One of these girls really cares about people, and her purpose is to be a good doctor. The other cares about money and says that being a doctor will give her the chance to make it. The one who cares about people wrote home to her parents in Hong Kong and said, “I have found another Hong Kong girl studying here with me, but I don't think we can ever be good friends, because our purposes are so different.” In fact, one girl really intends to be a doctor and wants to heal the sick; the other only wants to run a business in medicine and make money. I am sure you can judge which girl is going to be happy and useful in life.
This attitude is found in many other jobs, because Hong Kong encourages this outlook. Sometimes the result can hurt other people. I remember a widow who came to see me, just after her husband had died of a brain tumour. The widow explained to me that the doctor who examined her husband could have saved his life if they had been able to pay him $10,000, the cost of a brain operation. They did not have the money and the man died. He was quite a young man. To my thinking, that doctor was not really a doctor at all, and he was guilty of murder because he could have saved another man's life but he did not, merely for the sake of money.

At the moment I am investigating a lot of legal cases. Some of them are young people who are probably innocent of any crime, and they need a lawyer to help them but they cannot afford one. Sometimes I can find a lawyer who cares about people and will take the cases for a very small charge or even for nothing. But in other cases, I find that a lawyer may charge a high fee but he still does not care whether he wins or loses the case.

Likewise, I am concerned about the new education system. Of course, I am very happy that at some time all teachers will be qualified and all will have equal pay. Teachers in my own country, Britain, have had equal pay and good
conditions for many years, even when I was a young teacher. But that does not mean that all teachers were good teachers. What is the meaning of "qualified"? It simply means having a piece of paper to prove that one has studied in a college and passed the examination at the end of the course, whether it is for being a lawyer, a doctor, a nurse, or teacher, or any other profession. A qualified teacher, therefore, is one who holds a certificate from a college of education. But in my opinion, after being a teacher for about thirty years, being qualified has very little to do with textbooks and examinations. It does have a lot to do with a person's attitude towards the job. I can think of some unqualified teachers in Hong Kong who are very successful in teaching because their hearts are in the job. I can think of some qualified teachers who do not care how they do their job because they imagine that their certificate entitled them to their pay, no matter how badly they teach.

Therefore, I hope that all you young graduates will think carefully what you are doing. Are you just aiming at earning the most money for the least effort? Or are you doing a job that gives you satisfaction because you like to do it, because you do your best, and because you care for other people? Even if you are working in a factory, the same principle applies. You can work just for your wages and not care about the job, or you can make up your mind that the things you make or do will be done well, to make others happy and satisfied.
I believe that your future happiness depends upon how you face your job. Money can buy you material things, but material things become dull after a time. For example, no matter how much money you have, you can still only eat one good meal at a time; you can still only wear one dress at one time; you cannot watch more than one TV set at a time. There is a limit on enjoyment of material things, and there is a limit on material things. But if you love deeper things, that is, if you care about doing your job well, you want to serve the public and make the world a better place for others, you are interested in helping others when they are in difficulty, you hope to do something for the future generation — then there will be no limit to your lives, and there will be no limit to the satisfaction you will feel in your job.

May I wish you success in the things that really matter in life.