



Congratulations Catamounts! You have navigated a most unusual and challenging year and have every reason to be immensely proud of your achievement.

It's been a year where we have lost loved ones and friends to the pandemic, families have faced financial hardship, social interaction has been severely curtailed in the interest of public health, and wave after wave of disturbing national events have tested our faith in humanity. It's an understatement to say this hasn't been easy on anyone.

You sacrificed to keep one another safe, helping us find a way to not only make it successfully through the year but to also prepare for our return to a near-normal semester this fall. With your concern for those around you and your cooperation, you have already paid it forward.

So, yes, let us celebrate. Our graduates and their families have a lot to be proud of. There is a sense of relief and a sense of accomplishment against the odds. For this, I salute you.

I seek your indulgence as I pause and ask the families, loved ones and friends of our graduates – here and watching from afar – to rise and be recognized. Thank you!

But now let us also offer up a prayer for those parts of the world where the virus still rages and where incredible suffering and loss of life continues, the likes of which has not been seen in generations.

I ask for us, therefore, to celebrate also in a spirit of humility and compassion. Humility in the awareness that we cannot know everything, or be right all the time. And compassion in the understanding that behind every mask, there is a face, and behind every face, there is a story that deserves to be heard and understood if possible, but respected at least. Let's rededicate ourselves to doing our part in building a safer community, a healthier society, a healthy environment, and a more optimistic world.

The world needs you. On so many fronts – whether it be to recover from what the pandemic has wrought, social and racial justice that has been long in coming, climate change, or even the very idea and practice of democracy itself that is under threat – the world needs you. At the same time, working towards solutions has been rendered harder as we have increasingly retreated to our poles and into our own echo chambers, to the detriment of civil discourse and open exchange of ideas.

You can change the world, bit by bit, but only if we listen to each other, truly listen, and do so in a healing spirit of compassion, and with humility.

And I am confident a University of Vermont education has prepared you to contribute richly. You have learnt much during your years – in your classrooms, in your field experiences, in your internships, in your interactions with your friends, and most importantly, from your unique personal journeys. Apply your inquisitive minds, your belief in scientific and technological advancements, your grounding in a well-rounded liberal education, and your innovative approaches to solving the increasingly complex problems the world is facing.

I couldn't be happier to share this, my first, commencement at UVM with your intrepid and resilient Class of 2021. I have no doubt you will go out into the world and make your alma mater proud. You have my very best wishes, today and always!