

Clint,

Your fascination with school mottos resonated with me immediately. I dabble in Latin; after all, the ancient and venerable language of the Church is a cornerstone of life at Notre Dame.

Notre Dame is dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, and our motto, *Vita Dulcedo Spes*, translates directly to “Life, Sweetness, Hope,” but that literal translation requires additional context to parse. Those words come from the Salve Regina, one of the oldest Marian antiphons in the Christian tradition, and each of these epithets of Mary is a statement about the Christian life.

For Catholics, Mary is the vehicle by which life was brought back to us – as the bearer of Jesus, whom Christians know as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Mary brought the gift of life to a fallen people who had been spiritually dead. But practically, Mary is also our spiritual heart rate monitor; St. Germanus preached that “to pronounce the name of Mary with affection is a sign of life in the soul, or at least a sign that life will soon return there.” And according to St. Alphonsus Liguori, Mary has a special sympathy for those struggling to persevere through affliction.

By always keeping the example of our patron in mind, we retain the strength to battle through both spiritual challenges and earthly ones. Our motto reminds us not just that we are capable of accomplishing more than we feel we can in the moment, but also that there is life beyond loss.

This is the meaning of the second invocation in our motto, that Mary is our “sweetness.” The Catholic faith has a certain macabre quality that is not lost on us here at Notre Dame – sweetness is here a euphemism for consolation and comfort in our final hours on earth. The Hail Mary prayer concludes to “pray for us...now and at the hour of our death.” It is a reminder that spiritual comfort will be with us as long as we live. It is my mission that the players who pass through my program’s halls always feel the comfort and solace of our community, from the moment they arrive until their last days.

The final epithet of Mary, “our Hope,” is an expression that confuses many. What does it mean for a person to represent hope? Well, it has a twofold meaning. One common complaint I hear about athletes is that “Prayer before a game is stupid. You think God cares who wins a basketball game?” Notre Dame fans often quip that “God doesn’t care, but His Mother does.” And it’s true that we often wouldn’t bother to bring our small, petty concerns to God, thinking that they are unworthy, beneath his attention. Mary has pity on us, standing in the corner, awestruck like a child. Mary tells us “let’s go talk to God about it. I’m sure He can help.” I

To Catholics, we could add to Mary’s many titles “Mother of Moral Support.”

So that’s the Salve Regina, and in many ways, it epitomizes what it means to be a Notre Dame student, graduate, or fan. Dating to the tenth century, it embodies our reverence for history and tradition – Notre Dame has played basketball for nearly two hundred years. This is a school that imparts timeless wisdom.

And we try to emulate the supportive, nurturing qualities that we ask of Our Lady in our prayers. Notre Dame's campus culture is famous, especially in the permanent friendships and found family of your residence hall and the enormous campus enthusiasm for our teams.

Our motto (right down to its grim contemplation of our dying day) also encapsulates some of the harsh truths of being an athlete and a human being. There will be days where nothing goes your way. There will be days where you miss the tournament, crash out of the first round, lose in double overtime. There will be days where it feels Satan himself is aiming his worst squarely at you.

But at our highest heights and our lowest lows, Notre Dame is here for us. Our Lady will never abandon us.