



# The Minstrel

NEWSLETTER OF GREGORY THE GREAT ACADEMY

September 2023

Dear Friend,

“Drive around to the back,” I told the father as I shook his hand. “The head dormfather is there and he’ll show you to the right dorm room.” As I gave these instructions amid the suitcase bustle-and-hum of another opening day, I noticed the boy who stood silently by his father. He was a fine-looking lad with sandy hair, getting broad in the shoulders and square in the jaw.

In particular, I noticed a steely, even surly, look in his eyes—a look that is so often used by boys to hide fear. I have seen it a thousand times. It was clear to me that this young man was far from enthused about being here, but even so, I have every confidence that he will part from us in four years in tears, as I have seen so many do.

In fact, looking at that boy’s stormy countenance, I could hardly help smiling in my assurance of what he is about to discover, especially the friends he is about to make that will last his whole life. If only he knew the nature of the journey he is beginning and how it will all end. But that is for the greybeards to know and to give good guidance along the way to an end that we anticipate. As John Senior said once,

We have to have an experience of the end before we can do anything serious about the appropriate means. That is, there has to be a way of knowing something about the end before you get there. Otherwise, you won’t have any idea of the right means to choose. Unless you have some knowledge of the end, there is no way you can choose the means... And so it is with the ultimate goals in life.

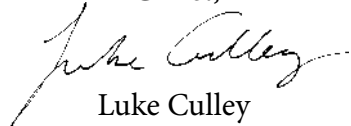
The conclusion must be considered together with the origin, and so it is with us as we begin another school year. We begin with so many new students, strangers to us, beginning a journey. But though we see and



expect difficulties of transition and acclimation during these early days, I know, having seen this play out again and again, that the journey for all these students will end with the beginning of great friends who have great love for one another. As it goes from *Twelfth Night*, “journeys end with lovers meeting.”

Please support these boys as their journeys begin. We rely entirely on you to make their education, their spiritual growth, and their friendships possible. Your donation is truly a gift of a spiritual nature that helps these boys in our care become strong Catholic men who are close to each other and to Christ. Please give generously. Thank you.

In Christ,

  
Luke Culley



Luke Culley  
Headmaster





## Senior Pilgrimage to Częstochowa



This summer, I had the privilege of helping lead the Senior Pilgrimage in Poland, where we walked with the newly-graduated Class of 2023 from Kraków to Częstochowa.

In many ways, the Polish people are a last bastion of the Faith in Europe. On every street corner there was a well-maintained shrine to Our Lady, every town parish had several well-attended daily Masses, and Eucharistic processions stretched through the streets of industrial cities. There is a strength to the Polish faith that was truly inspiring, but there was one moment where we found that our little group of American pilgrims shared a Catholic character that was surprising even to the Poles.

Having revered the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa and attended Mass earlier in the day, we were playing music outside a small pub. We had been alone at the place for a little while before a group of young people arrived and sat at a table across from us. We continued to





play music and enjoy a few laughs, as the newcomers watched and listened.

Eventually we began talking with them. As we told them about our pilgrimage, they were surprised. "Pilgrims? Are you seminarians?" They could not fathom a young group with such charisma and passion for the Faith being simply high-schoolers. One of the men told us he had never seen such a variety of Catholic men in his life. As pilgrims in such a Catholic country, it was our turn to be surprised. How could a country so strong in the Faith be surprised by our joy in the completion of a great pilgrimage?

Perhaps it was the manner in which our joy was manifested after a day balanced by solemnity, reverence, joy, and laughter. Between our music, juggling, and spirit of adventure,



*The pilgrims from Gregory the Great Academy sign the guest book in the library of the ancient Monastery of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, where the famous icon is enshrined. As they sign, they look back through the pages to find the names of their old classmates, gaining a sense of their place in the pilgrim tradition of their school.*

our style of pilgrimage was far from pedestrian - even though we walked the whole way! And perhaps it was that embrace of playing the fool for God in holy places far from our home

that allowed us to share a new spark of Catholicism in an ancient Catholic country.

—Patrick Alvis,  
Dormfather and Teacher

## Camp Highlander 2023

For many schools, the beginning of summer is a well-earned respite from the hard work of education. But here at Gregory the Great, it is a time when we shift our focus to the next generation. 30 rising 7th and 8th graders (and a few 9th grad-

ers) gathered together for the third Camp Highlander. Under the leadership of Mr. Culley and alumnus Issac Shipman, as well as a stalwart group of recent graduates and rising seniors, the campers experienced the life of a Highlander in a way nobody outside of our student body has. Separated into four Scottish clans, from sunup to sundown the counselors threw everything at them, and they joyfully took up intense challenges and extraordinary adventures, all while soaking in the manly culture of our Academy. They juggled, they sang, and they prayed like true Highlanders.

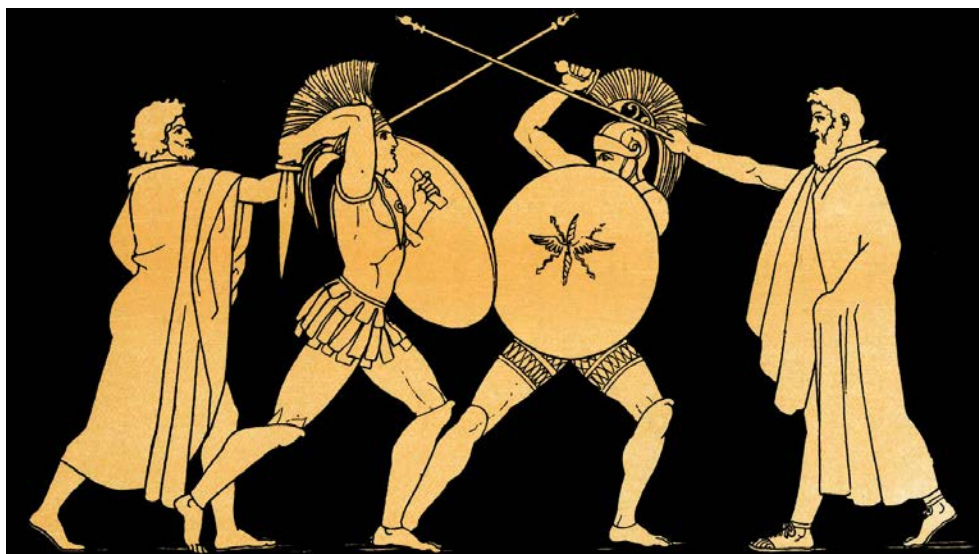
The week culminated with the boys making a 12-mile pilgrimage from the Academy to Scranton where they celebrated Divine Liturgy with Fr. Christopher. And then for hours, the city echoed with song as the boys performed their juggling show for the locals, raising money for their final feast. With over \$700 in hand, feast they did!



We thank all of the parents for trusting us with their little guys, and we can't wait for a whole new crew to arrive for camp next year, enlivening our campus even after the school year is done.



“...THE MEN MUST  
KNOW OUR CLAIM;  
WE ARE SWORN  
FRIENDS FROM OUR  
FATHERS' DAYS TILL  
NOW!” —*The Iliad*, Bk 6



Of the myriad stirring moments in *The Iliad*, among the most elevating is when Diomedes, a Greek, meets Glaucus, a Lycian fighting for Troy, in the pitch of battle. In epic fashion, each warrior proclaims their identity to the other before clash-

were friends. They immediately vow friendship with each other in honor of their families and exchange armor with the promise to avoid each other in the bloody fray.

Moments like these, as rich as poetry and as binding as custom, are

meet each other in classroom, dorm, and field, as their fathers did before them, learning from one another that their fathers were friends and became so in those very spaces and upon the very adventures they now share.

This is an experience of affirmation and a rite of passage that their fathers never had, which is now asserting itself like a badge of belonging. This year, we welcome the sons of alumni Mark Schwerdt ('97), Sean Fitzpatrick ('98), Garret van Beek ('99), and Christopher Smith ('03). These Freshmen—Finn, Leo, Sebastian, and Virgil—will eye each other as their fathers did before them decades ago and carry on a generational friendship begun long ago and that continues to this day. These four join their other legacy comrades, Emile Jansen, Thomas Ranieri, Kevin O'Brien, Fred Fraser, and Peter Fraser.

Please pray for these alumni sons that they will follow in their fathers' footsteps at the Academy and serve as a testament to the truth that the stability and strength of any school lies largely in alumni loyalty—which Gregory the Great has been blessed with in spades.



*Freshmen Finn Schwerdt, Sebastian van Beek, Leo Fitzpatrick, and Virgil Smith meet all together for the first time in the dorms at Gregory the Great on the opening day of soccer camp. Godspeed to them on their journey together!*

ing their bronze weapons to send one or the other down to the House of Death. But as they take turns telling their heroic heritages, Diomedes and Glaucus realize that their grandfathers

unfolding with increasing frequency upon the battlefields of St. Gregory's as more and more sons of alumni assume their places in our ranks. At the beginning of every year, these boys