

**VALEDICTORY SPEECH DELIVERED BY ODUNSI ODUNAYO ESTHER ON BEHALF OF THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2018 AT THE 27<sup>TH</sup> CONVOCATION CEREMONY OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA**

The Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, other Principal Officers of the University, Deans of Colleges, Head of Departments, Heads of Units, amiable lecturers, members of staff, distinguished guests, families, friends and of course the graduating class of 2018.

As I stand here looking at everyone seated here today, I do not only sense the excitement, happiness and joyous energy in this auditorium but I can literally taste the sense of fulfilment that fills the air. For our parents, you have a sense of joy in knowing that the little child you have raised has not just earned a university degree but has grown into responsibility and of course, putting those ‘strategic’ periodic calls of checking on us to an end. For families, friends, brothers and sisters, the sense of pride you have in your sibling or friend’s accomplishments is immeasurable and you have gained a whole new sense of respect for them. However, nothing can top the feelings that we the graduates have right now.

We all came into the university as novices or in regular parlance ‘as JJs’. We came in with our lofty dreams etched in our hearts, or packed in the big boxes we brought down from home. We had no idea what lay ahead but we went all in and took on the experience. The truth be told, it wasn’t all bliss and laughter as there were days of running from JAO 3 to MPO1 and from COLMAS building back to COLANIM auditorium. Yet, we can say that we came, we saw, we laughed, we cried, we queued, we prayed and most importantly, WE WON! I stand here today as a testimony to that victory.

I was raised in an economically disadvantaged background in the storied town of Ijebu Ode. I was raised in such conditions that might cripple and crush every iota of drive and ambition. However, I channelled that disadvantage into a passion for learning and I let it drive me to succeed. I knew that the way I could make this world a better place and contribute to the community around me was to succeed in my academic pursuits. I determined that even with the financial challenges that surrounded me, I would never be deterred in my excellent academic pursuit. Standing here before you today as the Valedictorian of the graduating class of 2018 is a fruit of that determination.

I discovered, during my struggles of wading through financial challenges and my academic pursuit, that poverty or lack of financial comfort will only serve as a limitation to one’s dreams if one focuses on it. If you, however, focus on what you need to do and believe that what you are doing will yield, your challenges will not hinder you. In spite of my challenges, I was flourishing in my academic work, and volunteering and taking an active role in community service. My low-

income was not a barrier but a launching pad to motivate and propel my success. I developed the tenacity, perseverance and persistence needed to pull through challenging situations to achieve my dreams and these prepared me to face whatever the world out there has to throw at me.

However, I do not stand here as a lone star in the night sky. I stand here as a representation of the tenacious, creative, and excellent spirit every graduate here carries. I stand here as a reminder that you can take your life in your grasp and scale through the hurdles ahead of you. I stand here to incite in you that the world is your canvas and you decide what you paint on it. I stand here to show you that one with God and the right priorities is truly majority. I stand here to validate the concept of grace and God's favour.

Yet, I stand here to challenge you to stop limiting yourself by your economic situations. I challenge you to look inwards and bring forth all the wonderful light and colours you can add to the world. I challenge you to even look beyond whatever grade you are graduating with and know that **YOU CAN ALWAYS BE BETTER!** Not all of us will be in academics, not all of us will have master's degrees or PhDs, not all of us will be listed in Forbes list or Times magazine. Yet, **ALL OF US CAN SHINE BRIGHTLY AND BRING JOY TO THIS WORLD IN ALL WE DO.** We can all also raise the banner of our names, families and of course this great citadel FUNAAB. So, I challenge you, **GO SHINE AND SHINE!**

As I end my chatter, I say to every parent here, keep supporting us. Stand by us even when we don't get it right. Don't impress your dreams on us. Rather, help us spread our wings with your prayers and counsel. Keep being the shoulder on which we climb to see the world. To every lecturer and instructor here seated, on behalf of other grandaunts, I say thank you. We will always be a reflection of your investments, so I challenge you also, beyond the status quo, give your best to everyone. You never know what that little boy or girl in your class will turn out to be, so give us your best.

FUNAAB has been for me way more than a place of academic learning as I have grown here. I will like, at this juncture acknowledge the role played by the FUNAAB's Chapter of the Nigeria Association of University Women under the leadership of Prof. Comfort Onifade. The Association empowered me by sponsoring my entrepreneurial training as a Fashion Designer under the University's CENT programme; the skill helped in alleviating my 'financial stress' tremendously and has become very useful to me today.

Other University resources which contributed to this success story are: the affordable tuition fee and conducive learning environment (mancot, hostel and library facilities). The hostel facilities provided me more conducive academic atmosphere and social integration. MANCOT made the transportation system highly subsidized and relatively free. The 'Nimbe Adedipe Library's exceptional, reliable, conducive and convenient facilities of a 24-hour/7 examination period services is highly commendable!

I appreciate the efforts of the Vice-Chancellors who served during my studentship, specifically, the current Vice-Chancellor; Professor Felix Kolawole Salako for being in loco parentis and concerned with the welfare and comfortability of students on campus. I want to use this opportunity to show my appreciation to the University Management for ensuring functional facilities in the University, that have made it possible for many to get quality education. I do sincerely hope the facilities are upgraded and maintained so that those after us can also have a conducive environment to achieve their dreams. The best investment that any society makes is in the education of its young people, and this shouldn't basically be looked upon myopically as a 'cost'. It should rather be looked upon as the best investment that any society can make." We must preserve the institutions that have made dreams come true-for students like me.

I would like to express my special appreciation and thanks to my Guardian, Dr. Bosede A. Ajiboye of the University Library, you have been a great mentor to me. Being under your guidance has been an amazing experience. Thank you for your mentorship and positive influence! I would like to thank all lecturers in the Department of Aquaculture and Fisheries Management, most especially my project supervisor; Professor Francisa George for encouraging my research and for allowing me to grow as a research scientist. Your advice on both research as well as on my career have been invaluable.

At FUNAAB, I have met great people and individuals that have inspired me to a great extent, these are my reading partners; Ajao Blessing, Seyi Adisa, Akanbi Joshua and Olayode Seun. Studying can be rough, especially in the University, but having someone to study with makes it so much better and interesting. Thank you all for your companionship.

A special thanks to my family members. Words are not enough to express how grateful I am to my mother and father for all the sacrifices they made on my behalf. Their prayers had sustained me thus far. I would also like to thank my supportive husband; Engineer Sholanke Johnson and my sister, Odunsi Morenikeji, I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement and support throughout this experience.

Saving the best for last, finally, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ, my good Father for his day-by-day guidance and preservation. You are the one who let me finish my degree and I will keep on trusting you for my future. Thank you Lord.

Always remember dear colleagues that, the road may be rough, the journey may be tough and the experience may be bitter, but they are stepping stones to our future thrones. Thus, to our juniors, I say "May the winds favour your sail!"

**Miss Odunsi Odunayo Esther**