Be prepared for change. Be yourself. Be a part of the political process. Be concerned about your neighbor. Be one who keeps the faith.

He called them the “Five B’s,” and U.S. District Judge U.W. Clemon offered them to the Class of 2003 as suggestions for “coming of age in this new millennium.”

Clemon, chief judge of the Northern District of Alabama, gave the keynote address at Birmingham-Southern’s 144th Commencement ceremonies May 24. More than 4,000 family members and friends attended Commencement in Boutwell Auditorium in downtown Birmingham.

Clemon stressed upon the 312 graduates who were receiving bachelor’s or master’s degrees that they were entering a world that has changed drastically since the graduates themselves first entered into it.

“In the relatively short span of your lives, a single generation, you have seen our great nation undergo a fundamental mutation,” said Clemon. “We have moved from the status of one of the two competitors in a vast time and energy-consuming Cold War to the enviable status of being the most powerful nation on the face of the Earth. …

“... But we have learned, even more suddenly and tragically than our rise to world supremacy, that in all our power and dominance, we are not invulnerable. …

“... And so it is that when you enter the occupations and professions you have chosen for yourselves, you will be dealing with the ambivalent reality of our country’s world supremacy, on the one hand, and its domestic vulnerability on the other.

“You should also keep in mind that this country’s opportunities are golden and unlimited.”

In addition to his tenure as a U.S. district judge, Clemon has served as a lawyer and a member of the state Legislature. Last year, Birmingham-Southern established the Judge U.W. Clemon Endowed Honors Pre-Law Scholarship to honor his contributions to his profession and the community. The scholarship assists deserving minority students who plan to enter law school upon graduation.

Prior to Commencement, the traditional Baccalaureate Service was held at First United Methodist Church in downtown Birmingham. Bishop Robert C. Morgan, a 1956 BSC graduate and bishop-in-residence at the college, delivered the Baccalaureate address.

Morgan urged the graduates to be amateurs, to do what they do in life for the love of it.