



PRINCIPAL'S ASSEMBLY High Achievers & Commissioning - Years 6 and 12 Student Leaders

10 February 2021

Good Morning High Achievers of 2020, Student Leaders Years 6 and 12, Marist Brothers, Staff, Students and Families.

There is a saying, *the best laid plans of mice and men.....* which comes from the Robert Burns poem **to a mouse**. The intent of the saying, in context, is that no matter how well a project has been planned, things can go wrong.

So, our assembly today was planned to be held last Wednesday in the gymnasium with 1130 Years 7-12 students celebrating our High Achievers of 2020 with their families. Our Years 6 and 12 student leaders were due to be commissioned at our PK-12 Mass on Thursday.

But due to the announcement of a COVID lockdown in WA and subsequent restrictions, we meet in situ with only Year 12 students and our Year 6 Leaders in the Marist Auditorium. Online we are joined by the rest of the Marcellin and Lavalla Campuses, our High Achievers and their families, parents of our student leaders and members of the wider community.

There is no doubt that the complexity and challenges that have pervaded the world over the last 12 months with the advent of the COVID Pandemic have become very real for us here in WA. In a local context, the COVID crisis here has been compounded by fires and floods across the State. For each crisis there have been many who have risen to the challenge, responded with courage, acted with conviction and sought to animate others to do the same.

How we respond to challenges and how we overcome adversity is the mark of a society.

On 20 January this year we witnessed the inauguration of the new USA President Joseph R Biden. This event is a significant pivot point in the world in light of the unrest that has permeated that countryand many would argue in other parts of the world. For example, two weeks earlier the Capitol Building in Washing DC, in which the inauguration was held, was stormed by protestors exemplifying in some ways the duress the USA has endured.

The highlight of this ceremony for me was the inspirational words - not from the newly elected president - but from a young woman, Amanda Gorman..... the youngest inaugural poet in US History who recited her poem "The Hill We Climb".

In her poem she describes herself as "a skinny black girl descended from slaves and raised by a single mother who can dream of becoming president only to find herself reciting for one".

It is worth noting that Amanda had a speech impediment during childhood – she saw it as a strength because “since she was experiencing these obstacles in terms of her auditory and vocal skills, she became really good at reading and writing. She realized that at a young age when she was reciting the Marianne Deborah Williamson quote that:

'Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate, our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure'.

Amanda's poem focussed on the turbulent events that have punctuated the United States over the last few years with specific reference to the lead up to the presidential election and the storming of the Capitol Building on 6 January.

An excerpt from her poem:

But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated. In this truth, in this faith we trust, for while we have our eyes on the future, history has its eyes on us....

This is the era of just redemption. We feared it at its inception. We did not feel prepared to be the heirs of such a terrifying hour, but within it, we found the power to author a new chapter, to offer hope and laughter to ourselves so while once we asked, how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe? Now we assert, how could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

What can we learn from Amanda's words?

Amanda's message should inspire us to come together not just as a global community but for us here at Newman College – a PK-12 community of 1850 students - in the north western suburbs of Perth.

Her message draws upon one's individual (yours) intent as a citizen, a member of a society who has the power to make a difference and in doing so:

- To be Hopeful
- To be Bold
- To take risks
- To overcome adversity
- To be courageous and to believe in the power of the collective

It is incumbent upon every member of our community – for students, teachers and alumni - to know that they have the power to be the author of a new chapter, to proffer hope, to prevail over the challenges and the complexities and the opportunities that are now inherently a part of the world in which we live.

Her concluding statement draws us to our vision for learning – shine through discovery – where she focuses on the power of light..... She says:

**“There is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.”**

The light of every child in this community, PK-12 can shine light, can shine bright if we are brave enough to be it.

Today we celebrate the High Achievers of the Class of 2020 who were brave enough to let their light shine. You are acknowledged today because of hard work, belief and faith in what was possible.

Your efforts, demonstrated by application, resilience, discipline, shared values, friendships and self-belief, have enhanced our Newman culture. Many thanks must go to Mrs Carla Pastorelli, your Leader of Wellbeing, now Deputy Principal, Secondary, your teachers and families for supporting you on your journey.

Thank you for sharing your gifts and talents, for sharing your leadership; your presence today is valued and acknowledged. Let us put our hands together for the Class of 2020.

TO OUR STUDENT LEADERS IN YEAR 12 AND YEAR 6

At the heart of our leadership at Newman College is the way we commit ourselves to our own personal excellence to build the collective intent of our school. There are many points we can look towards to guide us – our vision for learning for example. But perhaps our greatest pointer and model for leadership rests in the example of Christ.

In John's Gospel, Jesus said *I came so that they may have life and have it to the full*. These words have importance – not just for you as leaders but for all of us. These words challenge us to make the lives of others better, both in word and action.

I wish you every success this year in your endeavours to do so. Let us put our hands together for the Class of 2020.

TO ALL OUR STUDENTS TODAY

And I particularly welcome all our new students.

The journey you are undertaking is only the beginning. Aspire and dream about the things you want to do in life. Take each day as a new opportunity to learn something new, to deepen your knowledge, cultivate relationships and participate and contribute to every moment of your day. Commit to excellence in all that you do.

CONCLUSION

We are strengthened as a Marist school by our characteristics of Presence, Love of Work, Simplicity, In the Way of Mary and Family Spirit. These characteristics drive the cultural elements that shape who we are, what we represent and what we are going to become and, ultimately, the legacy that will define who we are.

To that end, I recognize and give thanks to our Marist community, specifically our Marist Brothers. The legacy of this Marist Project, now over 200 years old, is that we walk with young people underpinned by being present to each other, respectful in the relationships we cultivate and the people who God asks us to be.

So for 2021 let us be full of hope, joy and excitement of what is possible with the expectation of success. And to finish what better way than to elicit the words of this fine young woman Amanda Gorman.....

“And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us, but what stands before us.”