

Year 12 Graduation
Wednesday 20 October 2021
Principal's Speech

Good Evening Year 12, Staff, Families, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Marist Theme for 2021 is **Breathe, the Spirit of Life.**

This theme has been our guiding light for our community as it has challenged us to stop and reflect on our place in the world and in the reality of the world in which we live.

If we take a moment now to breathe and to **perhaps cast our minds back to where it all began as you commenced your secondary school journey in 2016.** You were sitting in the gymnasium full of expectation and hope, and perhaps some anxiety of what the next 6 years would bring. 2016 was the start of your journey of Secondary school at Newman College, as it was mine.

When I spoke to you in your first days as Year 7 students, the words of encouragement were a marker for the challenges, moreover opportunities, that lay ahead.

Secondary education offers such a diverse range of academic and co-curricular pursuits condensed within a 6 year window. It has been in this window where all of you have undergone the most significant transformation you will ever have in your lives - **be it emotional, spiritual, intellectual and physical.** You have grown from **children, to adolescents, to young adults.**

Perhaps the greatest change which we could not have envisaged 6 years ago was the advent of Covid-19. **The Pandemic has changed the world forever.** In Western Australia we may not have been impacted like other parts of Australia or the world. However, as the world opens up, and as Western Australia opens up, **we will have to adapt to a new way of living.**

If we go back in history, there are many examples of how society, cultures and people have had to adapt and change the journey of their lives due to unforeseen events. **Today these stories provide reflection and consideration of how we might respond.**

One such story is that of Eddie Jaku. Eddie was a Jewish boy living in Germany in the 1930s during the rise of Adolph Hitler and the Nazis. The Jewish people of the time were marginalised and considered outcasts. By the end of 1945, 6 million Jews would have died as a result of the Holocaust.

For Eddie, at the age of 13, he was prohibited from going to school because he was Jewish. This setback was soon negated by Eddie's father, who sent him to a town 4 hours away under a non-Jewish identity so that he could continue his education in mechanical engineering... while also living in an orphanage, pretending to have no family. By the time he completed school, World War II had commenced and over the next six years Eddie would endure the trials of war.

Eddie was captured by the Nazis on 4 different occasions and placed in concentration camps, including the infamous Auschwitz.

He was serially beaten, shot and denied the most basic human rights and at one point weighted 27 kilograms.

Both of his parents were killed as were many other members of his family

Despite the trauma of war, Eddie survived:

- His survival was predicated on resilience, courage and a will to live
- His survival was formed by his family and the relationships that were cultivated through service to others.
- His survival was underpinned by his education because it gave him opportunities to adapt to the context.

But, perhaps the greatest attribute to his survival, put simply, was his attitude.

He said,

“I made a promise to God. If I survived, I would become a new person, dedicate the rest of my life to putting right the hurt done by the Nazis, and live every day to the fullest. And that is what I have done.”

Last week, on 12 October, Eddie Jaku died in Sydney Australia at the age of 101. For note, Eddie migrated to Australia after the war with his wife, Flore, and lived a happy and contented life in Sydney.

In 2020, Eddie released a book called *‘The Happiest Man on Earth: The Beautiful Life of an Auschwitz Survivor’*..... where he shares not only his harrowing story of survival but, more importantly, how he found gratitude, kindness and hope in the darkest of places.

His messages are:

- ***“Happiness does not fall from the sky; it is in your hands; happiness comes from inside yourself and from the people you love.”***
- ***“You can find kindness from anywhere, even from strangers.”***
- ***“The best balm for the soul is friendship and with that friendship we can do the impossible.”***
- ***“Education is a lifesaver.”***
- ***“The greatest thing you will ever do is be loved by another person.”***

Eddie Jaku’s story is one of hope, it is one of resilience, but moreover it is one of love. He lived in unprecedented times and endured hardships that we could never imagine. Yet, despite this, he was able to make the most of what he had and use his experience to live life and live it to the full.

Year 12, as you sit here today and reflect on your time at Newman College, I hope that your faith and learning experience at Newman College has given you the tools, the skills and the attitude required to adapt to the world as it continues to change, and to live your life to the full.

St John Henry Newman said –

- ***“To live is to change to be perfect is to have changed often.”***

It is this attitude that can provide a guiding light for a future that is unknown. Our Vision for Learning – Shine Through Discovery (let your light shine), has been our guiding light of who you are and what you have sought to achieve.

As you leave Newman College be assured that you have been in a community that has valued you, supported you and sought to grow you in faith, your learning and in the person God intends you to be. It has provided you with a foundation to build your character, your identity and support the development of your legacy.

You have exemplified the Marist notion of presence by the way you have valued relationships, through:

- your reflection and spirituality at the Year 12 Retreat,
- your response to the Covid-19 crisis and the support you provided each other,
- your participation in College events, co-curricular, Ministry, carnivals – who could forget the College Ball?
- your collaboration with your teachers,
- your respect and support of Mrs Bramanto, your PCG teachers, College Leadership Team and other students

Many thanks to Taylah and Matao, our College Captains, and the Student leadership group for your animation to and for your year group and the example you have provided to all members of our Community.

To your families, thank you for your support of our College and enabling us to have the privilege of walking with this fine group of young people.

I acknowledge and give thanks to our Marist community, specifically our Marist Brothers and, here tonight, Br Terry. 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 that God asks us to be.

So Year 12, the reverberation of your time in this Marist community is best summed up in the words of St Marcellin Champagnat,

“May their lives be an echo of what you have taught them”

Farewell Year 12 and we would look forward to watching how God’s plan for you is enacted in the years ahead.
