

Annual Distribution of Prizes
St Aloysius' College, Milsons Point, New South Wales, Australia
30 November 2021

ARPNS Arturo Sosa SJ

Mr Michael Morgan, Chair of the Board, Mr Mark Tannock, Principal, Fr Ross Jones SJ, Rector, Members of Staff, Parents and, especially, young men of St Aloysius' –

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you, even in this mode to which we have become accustomed in recent years and to congratulate you as you come to the end of the school year. It is unfortunate that because of the pandemic my planned visit to Australia in 2020 had to be cancelled. I was so looking forward to what my three predecessors as General, Fathers Nicolás, Kollenbach and Arrupe saw, your breathtaking view of the city of Sydney.

The Jesuit *Constitutions* it states that our vocation is “to travel through the world and to live in any part of it”. And you *do* find Jesuits almost anywhere. But for the followers of Ignatius of Loyola there was always something alluring about being in a city. There was an old saying, originally in Latin, which went something like this:

“Bernard loved the valleys, Benedict the mountains, Francis the towns, but Ignatius the great cities.”

Yes, Jesuits find themselves in a great variety of places but for St Ignatius something about “the mix” of the great cities was exciting, even exhilarating. Those crossroads of civilization, the thoroughfares and central plazas that offered such a wealth of possibilities.

When Ignatius and his companions moved to Rome, they settled upon a residential site where Jesuits still live to this day. Father Juan Polanco,

Ignatius' secretary at the time, noted that it was not chosen for its comfort or for spaciousness, but for its location. It was in the very heart of Rome. The Pope lived in one side of the block, the brothels on the other. The city government was within walking distance, as was the Jewish quarter. The upper middle-class and the hovels of the poor were side by side. In front was a piazza where people stopped and shopped, took time out to chat. There, as one commentator observed, Jesuits "talked to the daughters of popes and to the prostitutes alike; they counselled prince and catechised street urchins".

Certainly, your vast Australian countryside – the outback, the desert, the beaches – are all places of quiet beauty, of space and reflection. But the cities are places of a different attraction. They are bustling, cosmopolitan realms of varied faiths and cultures, of ideas and dreams, of social and economic conditions and movements. It was where Jesuits will engage the best architects and artists to design their places of worship. Where quality colleges will offer a schooling in Christian humanism. Yet cities were also divided communities, where Jesuits felt the freedom of the Gospel to move across sectors of prejudice, of class and religious distinctions. Ignatius was drawn towards such city crossroads where Christ's message of hope and peace would make the greatest impact.

That beautiful city which you look over, where you are entertained or nourished by the arts and culture, is also, like all cities, a city of shadows, of street people 'living rough', of violence and crime. It has an underbelly that I'm told you Aloysians, on St Vincent de Paul's Night Patrol, experience in conversations with God's poor in the parks and transport intersections.

Cities are places of paradox. The haunts of the powerbrokers and of the weak. Of wealth and poverty. Of consolation and desolation. Of the Good Spirit and

false voices. And most of you, in time, will move into that city of Sydney, or any very much like it.

That city beckons you, just as many cities beckoned Ignatius and his companions for mission.

I was delighted to learn that, in these constricted COVID times at the College, you have been exploring creative ways to carry on the Jesuit pedagogy. I heard that you adapted your last week of terms into what you called *Magis Weeks*, so as to live out with the 4Cs of Jesuit education that Father Kolenbach emphasised – Competence, Conscience, Compassion and Commitment. They are precisely the qualities you can bring into the city – that hub of business, culture and politics.

Bring to it your **competencies**, your talents, your professional skills, honed by a sense of the *magis*. Put them at the service of God's people for the good. Bring your **consciences** to bear when the false voices speak, when public opinion is not life-giving, when justice is denied, and values are eroded. Bring **compassion** for the many city-dwellers who suffer – the homeless, the refugees and asylum seekers, the indigenous Australians (whom I hear you care for and learn from in your Jarjum primary school in Redfern). Remember, compassion is 'empathy-in-action', hands complementing the heart. Finally, bring **commitment** – the committed Aloysian is as good as his word. Commitment to important tasks and to people. Commitments which are neither lightly discerned, nor lightly discarded. Take a staying power into the spaces you move into to inspire and encourage others, especially those who find it hard to hang on.

Like all those Aloysians who went before you – who experienced the Spanish flu, two World Wars and a Depression – you have lived through two very

tough years of pandemic. Tough, yes, yet I am sure also with many moments of grace for those with eyes to see. I am confident that a new day will eventually come.

St Paul understood this when he once wrote a letter to the Romans that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.

Your patron, Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, gave you a motto from his own look on life: *ad maiora natus*. Yes, you were born for much more than the hand which life has recently dealt you. So hold fast to hope.

Next time you walk down to Aloys on the way to school, look at the great city and remember that you have a mission to continue building that Kingdom for which you were born.

Again, congratulations. May the Lord bless you all and set your hearts on fire to breathe new life and energy into our wounded world.