



Will Troy – Cheshire House President

Cheshire House Mass Reflection

Parable of the Sower, Mark 4:1-9

An opportunity: a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.

Having the chance tonight to address the Cheshire community and reflect on my life in the Xavier colours was an opportunity I had my eyes set upon since I heard Will Golds' reflection back in year 9, sitting in this chapel. In his address, he emphasised the importance of making the most of opportunities, and from that day on I promised myself that I would take on every challenge which would come my way at Xavier. The sacrifices my parents had made to send me here were significant, so I made a pledge that as a way of giving back to them, I was going to make my experience at Xavier as worthwhile as I possibly could. The last seven years have been nothing short of eventful, and while some experiences have been better than others, I find it difficult to remember a dull day at this school.

This concept of opportunity can be drawn from tonight's gospel. The conclusion that I have made from the parable is that every seed represents a person. Every student in this chapel has been given an opportunity to study at Xavier. We are the lucky seeds, having landed in the 'good earth'. We have been given the chance to enhance our talents not only in the classroom but also on the Roche oval, in Marron Hall and on the EHPAC stage. Every person in here has a skill. You may still be unsure what that particular skill is, but what is certain is that the nurturing environment at Xavier College is such that provided that opportunities are made the most of, you will develop into a purposeful young man ready to take on any challenge.

Life is made up of an infinite amount of choices. We will always have a choice to enrich ourselves, to go that extra yard further, but it is up to us to take that opportunity by the scruff of the neck. I can guarantee that provided dedication is put into anything you do here, you will flourish and achieve something exceeding your 'wildest dreams', as Mark emphasises. In the words of Richard Branson, "If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say yes – then learn how to do it later."

It was just over seven years ago now when a small, scrawny boy arrived at the gates of Burke Hall, anxious about what was awaiting me. Looking back now, as a taller (but just as skinny) year 12, countless memories and experiences come rushing into my head, and it makes me appreciate how lucky I have been, and also how much I love this school. Through music ensembles, debating teams, and in particular sport, I have always strived to become the best version of myself. Playing in an APS premiership team for cricket last season will forever be one of the moments I cherish the most from my journey through Xavier.

However, I believe the service and reflection opportunities which I have undertaken have been where I have learned the most about myself. Afternoons at Friday night school have arguably been the most rewarding moments of my life. Watching my tutee grow and develop not only his reading and writing skills, but life lessons has brought me a sense of gratification which is frankly difficult to express. Following on from the Gospel, it can be interpreted that these people are seeds which landed on the road and didn't receive the opportunity to be given a thorough education. It has been fulfilling for me to see the way these marginalised students appreciate the opportunity presented to them and always look to the good, when often their lives are full of hardship and unrest. Going on the Arnhem Land immersion was an equally enriching experience. While confronting at first, as the Indigenous community itself was extremely run down and poorly maintained, it was inspiring to see the joy on the faces of the children when you spent time with them. These activities can come across as being tedious, and not worth it, however I strongly recommend considering it, as I can guarantee you that you will learn a lot more about yourself.



However, if there was one experience that I could recommend each boy in this room to undertake, it would have to be a Kairos retreat. Led by Father Middleton, the three-day experience allowed me to learn how important it is to love yourself and to see the good in all things. It gave me an appreciation for the unconditional love and support of my mates and teachers but in particular my family, without whom I would not be up here today.

As indulging and rewarding as some of these experiences have been, when I was asked to reflect on my time here, none of these individual experiences stood out. What I have enjoyed most at Xavier hasn't necessarily been what I have done and the good times I've had. Instead, the people with whom I have journeyed through Xavier will always be what I remember. To be able to share an experience like an APS cricket premiership, a World Challenge expedition or even just a study session in the library with your best mates is what I have loved most about Xavier. Moments like winning the Summer Carnival yesterday are what give me life at Xavier, and I urge you all to cherish these experiences with your mates, because they don't come around too often, especially with our record – soon to change

Last year affected every single person in this room in a different way. Personally, I struggled greatly during the lockdowns. The same routine of waking up and spending 6 hours staring at a screen for what felt like an eternity had a considerable toll on both my physical and mental health. There were days at home where staying in my room all day seemed like the best way to spend my time, while I would frequently find myself lying in bed at night overthinking everything that was going on, missing out on valuable rest from what was a year full of stress and uncertainty. Looking back, 2020 to me felt like I was a seed which fell amongst the weeds, as everything seemed meaningless, and the never-ending cycle of disappointment often ruined my motivation. However, if the impact of coronavirus taught me one thing, it is that the support of others is what one needs most in life. The regular Microsoft Teams group calls to check up on mates, and the kicks of the footy at the park was what I desperately needed, and this helped me 'produce a harvest', despite initially being 'strangled' by the thorns.



We Cheshirians are so lucky to have such a caring core of teachers supporting us on our journey through Xavier. Personally, the last three years at the Senior Campus wouldn't have been the same without my tutor, Mr Banks-Smith and our wonderful Head of House Ms. Harmer. Always up for a chat about life, sport and everything in between, Banksy has always had a genuine interest in what I am doing, and he has truly allowed me to become the best version of myself. Similarly, Ms. Harmer has always been there for me through the ups and downs. She is the heart and soul of this house, and I can guarantee you that you would struggle to find someone as generous and caring as her. I know winning the summer carnival yesterday brought a lot of joy to her as I don't think we appreciate enough the work she puts into helping us grow as young men.

So, if there is something that I want everyone to draw from this reflection, it is simply to make the most of it. Join that team, that ensemble, try out for that play. Give your all for the mighty Cheshire. Sign up for Friday night school. Be a man for others. We are so lucky to have opportunities like this waiting to be taken. But most of all, appreciate those around you. The culture at Xavier and in this great house is something truly special. There is always someone who will be there for you in the hard times, and as the motto of Cheshire aptly puts it, there should be no call ignored.

Thank you.

