



Sam Purcell – Gonzaga House President

Spinola House Mass Reflection

“Put your best foot forward”

I am honoured to have the opportunity to address you all tonight, the Gonzaga community, and reflect on my journey so far in the Red and Black, under the mighty royal blue. It was something I always aspired to do since I was in year 9 and heard Joe Corser speak at this very mass. Joe Corser was an extremely wise House President, with many messages to share that I have taken on board and follow still to this day, but there was one message that really stood out for me, and that was to simply put your best foot forward. This is reflected in this evening’s Gospel reading, where Peter, Andrew, James and John, were called to have the courage to act when Jesus offered them the opportunity to join him.

I still vividly remember back in primary school in Grade 3, my report came home, and it was time for my parents to have a look through. To my surprise, they skipped through all the grades to the very bottom of the page, in which there were 5 bubbles, under the heading “effort”. The number of bubbles filled in reflected the amount of effort my Grade 3 teacher, Mr Walsh, believed I applied to my work that year, 1 being minimal effort, and 5 being maximal effort. My teacher had filled in 3 out of 5 bubbles. 3 out of 5, not horrible, not great, but what about my grades? It didn’t matter to mum and dad. They weren’t mad, but I could see they were disappointed. All they cared about, at the end of the day, was that I was going to school and trying my best, applying 5 out of 5 bubbles worth of effort, and putting my best foot forward. From that day on, I told myself that I would always try my best at school and strive to put my best foot forward, and coming to Xavier a year later, was the perfect opportunity to put that into practise.

The first step to putting your best foot forward, however, is putting a foot forward.

What I mean is, you need to have a crack. We are blessed with so many great opportunities

at this school, and it is almost impossible to immerse yourself in all of them, but to try, is to put your best foot forward.

The service opportunities I have been a part of, I believe have been where I have truly learned the most about myself. In year 9, I fully immersed myself into the Friday Night School program. Located at St Ignatius Richmond, the program is held every Friday night during the school term, and is designed to allow senior school students to tutor younger students of refugee backgrounds, to take some of the pressure off their parents who may not have the same ability to help them with their work. Unlike many, I never had a “regular” tutee that I would tutor each week, instead, my role was to sub in for those whose tutors were away. Although this meant at the start of each session, I was faced with the challenge of earning their respect as a tutor, this was easily overcome, and I believe I was able to get so much more out of the experience. I had the opportunity to tutor a variety of kids, each of different ages, abilities, and nationalities with a range of different stories, and personalities, allowing me to deeper understand the diversity of our community in Melbourne. Finishing at 6 o'clock, there was still plenty of time to spend my Friday night how I wanted to, so making the sacrifice of a few hours each week, to genuinely better the lives of others, was a truly awesome experience, and one I would strongly recommend.

In Year 9, I signed up for the World Challenge expedition to Costa Rica. As the name would suggest, the experience was undoubtedly, a challenge. I raised the money to fund the trip through movie nights, garage sales and online selling, and was off to Costa Rica at the close of the first term of Year 10. I had signed up with just one other close mate and had just come off the back of a significant surgery, so was nervous to travel overseas with a group of people that weren't my family for the first time in my life, but I was determined to put my best foot forward. And let me tell you, this trip was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I struggled with home sickness at times, and the places we stayed were far from glamorous, with nothing but a cold face washer to keep cool at night in the boiling heat. The 44-kilometre hike across 4 days in the Costa Rican incline and forest terrain caused several to faint or throw up, and it didn't help that a bunch of native ants decided to set up shop down my hiking boot and form large itchy puss-filled bites that I would have to walk with for the following days. But thanks to the team spirit and pre-downloaded Inbetweeners episodes being played on low brightness to conserve charge at night, everyone continued

to push through and make it to the end, where we got to swim in one of the most beautiful beaches and enjoy a cold sprite at the final destination. Some of my best friends were made on that trip, and equally, some of my best memories were formed, which if I had feared those challenges, and refrained from putting my best foot forward, I wouldn't have experienced.

However, one experience that I must recommend every single boy in this room undertake, is the Kairos retreat. Led by Father Middleton and fellow Xavierians, the four-day experience allowed me to learn the importance of loving yourself and seeing the good in all things, and most notably, extended my appreciation for the ongoing support of all those around me, in my mates and teachers but in particular my family, without whom I would not be up here today.

As amazing and rewarding as these co-curricular experiences have been, when asked to think about my time at the college, these experiences weren't the first to stand out. Instead, it was the memories I cherish from the day-to-day life at Xavier. Singing 'away in a manger' after being victorious in footy and making new friends through trying new sports in Triathlon, Golf, Table Tennis, Swimming, Touch Rugby, Basketball, Soccer, Cricket and Volleyball. Putting my hand up for leadership positions and going through the application and interview process taught me how to prepare for, and deal with interview situations. Even simply studying with friends in the library after school. Each and every one of these experiences have stemmed from simply trying to put my best foot forward, at a school in which, if you want to give things your best, there is plenty of support for you to do so.

Last year's lockdown and the irregular lockdowns still popping up throughout this year without a doubt strip each and every one of us of many of these day-to-day opportunities that make school-life so great, and that has affected each and every one of us differently. I know that personally, I really struggled with losing these social aspects of my life from within school and out, which are so important in keeping a balanced lifestyle with study. However, I like to look at this period as a great contrast to our outside lockdown life, to really help myself understand how we shouldn't take this lifestyle for granted, and thus,

when given the opportunity to walk the halls and participate in co-curricular activities, we need to take that chance to put our best foot forward.

I have tried to put my best foot forward throughout my time at Xavier, and I certainly don't always get it right, and that's totally normal, but as my time at this school comes to an end, I sit back and am thankful I have immersed myself in so much of what Xavier has to offer and while I also reflect on other things I could have been involved in, I am happy that I have tried to be guided by the wise words of Joe back in Year 9 and have put my best foot forward. So my message to you as Xaverians and - being a message that can extend far beyond those who attend the college – our extended Gonzaga family, much like those in the story of the first disciples who “immediately” followed Jesus, look to be courageous and put your best foot forward, and the rest will follow.

Sursum Corda.

