Ateneo Law School holds 72nd Commencement Exercises

Surviving four years of college alone is a daunting task. It takes a lot of emotional and mental stamina to get through it; four years of law school requires even more. For the 181 Juris Doctor graduates of the Ateneo Law School Class of 2018, July 15, 2018 was a bittersweet goodbye to the school and environment that had challenged and pushed them to their very limits.

Administrators of ALS as well as the Ateneo Professional Schools were there to see the graduates off, including Antonette Palma-Angelos, PhD, Vice President of the Professional Schools; Atty. Jose Maria G. Hofileña, current Dean of the Law School; Atty.

ALS faculty, graduates, and families filled up the Meralco Theater to witness the ceremonies.

Dean's Corner

By JOSE MARIA G. HOFILEÑA

I had barely warmed up my seat in the administration of the Ateneo Law School when the task of overseeing the graduation of Class of 2018 emerged as a pressing matter to urgently attend to. The irony was not lost with me—my welcome coinciding with a farewell ceremony. Apart from celebrating the scholastic achievements of the graduates and dispatching them on their impending mission to carry out the values of the school in the real world, the Baccalaureate Mass and Commencement Exercises of 2018 were notable in that despite the earlier culmination of his term as chief administrator of the Law School, Dean Sedfrey Candelaria was on hand to deliver an inspiring message at the Mass and on the stage, to witness the graduates ascend to receive their diplomas and medals. In addition, consistent with Fr. Ben Nebres, S.J.’s challenge to the graduates to dedicate themselves to the service of others, Professor Cesar Azucena’s over three decades of service to our community was deservedly recognized.

But as endings are inevitable, so are beginnings. And in respect of the Ateneo Law School, we have already seen quite a number of beginnings. In the organizational structure of the Ateneo Law School, there was a reinstitution of the Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

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ALS Student Council Launches the ALS App

By ROBERT L. ESCALANTE II

DURING the campaign period of the Student Council elections at the end of the previous academic year, the students expressed their concern about the inefficiency of some of the services offered by the Registrar’s Office, primarily due to the lack of personnel. In order to address this, the Student Council envisioned an app that would handle queuing concerns in the students’ enrollment process.

Working with a group of programmers, the Student Council launched the ALS App during the summer of 2018. What initially began as a possible platform to have the queuing system done from the comforts of students’ homes resulted in a full-blown application with features, which include:

1. Queueing Number System. Through the queueing system, the students no longer have to wait all day in front of the Registrar’s Office to secure a queueing number. The night before enrollment, the students are given a number and a timeslot. This has made enrollment smoother and quicker.

2. Files dockets for all pertinent documents. It serves as a storage space for the Student Council to upload all the electronic copies of files that the students need from application forms, reviewers, the administration’s memorandums, and announcements.

3. Calendar of School Events. This contains all the projects of the Student Council, of the ALS Administration, and the school calendar itself. Organizations also have the option to include their events in the ALS App’s Calendar for the whole community to see.

4. Information Dissemination System. Through the App the SC Officers are able to directly send messages to the students for a quicker and more efficient means to communicate and disseminate information.

5. Events Wall. Much like a social media feed, it provides updates on the goings-on in the school.

6. Poll Mechanism. Through the App, the Student Council can ask the students to vote and show their stance on relevant issues happening outside or inside the school.

Currently, more features are being developed and will be added later on. The Student Council expects the full version of the app to be complete by the end of the semester.

Japan’s Shizuoka Bar Association visits ALS

Five members of the Shizuoka Bar Association’s International Communication Committee visited the Ateneo Law School on 06 July 2018 as part of their study visit. They were welcomed by ALS Dean Jose Maria G. Hofliñeda and Atty. Ryan Jeremiah D. Quan of the Graduate Legal Studies Institute. The purpose of the study visit was to learn more about the Philippine legal system and legal education in the country. Apart from these, Dean Hofliñeda talked about qualifying for admission to law schools in the Philippines and how the Bar Examination is administered. He also answered questions on how the ALS sets itself apart from other law schools by having a tracking system offered to its Juris Doctor students and a Master of Laws program that is international law-focused and is open to foreign lawyers.

The visit was facilitated by the Japan Embassy through Atty. Masao Dan (ALS LL.M. ’16).
The 4th International Scientific Congress on Private Law at the Ateneo Law School

On June 5 to 7, 2018, scholars and experts from different fields of discipline gathered at the Ateneo Law School (ALS) for the 4th International Scientific Congress on Private Law of the Philippines and Spain: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on Emerging Issues.

The congress was hosted by ALS together with the Universidad de Málaga Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Deusto Facultad de Derecho, and the Philippine Association of Law Schools, in cooperation with the Embassy of Spain and the Legal Education Board.

This was a follow-through of a similar congress held at the University of Malaga in Spain last 2015 attended by law deans and professors from the Philippines.

Students, professors, and law practitioners presented their papers on various topics, including culture and heritage, civil rights and freedom, politics and self-determination, business and economics, access to health services and privacy concerns, assessing and regulating the use of technology, and transformative education and enhancing the capacity of courts.

Among the presenters were Rosario Hofileña, Head of the Investigative Unit of Rappler; Rev. Fr. Ranhilio C. Aquino, Dean of San Beda University Graduate School of Law; Ronald U. Mendoza, PhD, Dean of the Ateneo School of Government; and Justice Adolfo S. Azcuna, Retired Associate Justice of the Philippine Supreme Court and Chancellor of the Philippine Judicial Academy.

The Congress was then succeeded by the launch of Professor Ruben F. Balane’s most recent book, Jottings and Jurisprudence in Civil Law (Obligations and Contracts) and formally closed with a handing-over of copies of the book to the Ateneo Law School, the Universidad de Malaga, and the Universidad de Deusto.

Former ALS Dean Sedfrey M. Candelaria signs agreements for cooperation with the deans of the Universidad de Malaga and Universidad de Deusto.
Professor Balane Launches Obligations and Contracts Book

By the UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

Lawyer and professor Ruben F. Balane launched his newest book, Jottings and Jurisprudence in Civil Law (Obligations and Contracts) on June 8, 2018 at the Ateneo Law School (ALS), in conjunction with the final day of the 4th International Scientific Congress on Private Law of the Philippines and Spain.

Prof. Balane is an expert in civil law and a long-time faculty member of ALS and the University of the Philippines College of Law. ALS Dean Jose Maria G. Hofileña gave the opening remarks. “I am all but certain that his immeasurable wisdom will be jumping out of each and every page of this volume.”

“Writing a textbook like this one requires big-heartedness,” he added. “That Professor Balane possesses a heart bigger than his body can contain is a matter of which we need no convincing. Nonetheless, through this book, we see that rather than keep his invaluable thoughts, writings, and reflections to himself, Professor Balane innately yearns to guide us through the law on obligations and contracts and through it, to educate his students in the best possible manner in order for each one of them to better achieve their most cherished dreams.”

Atty. Sedfrey M. Candelaria, former ALS dean, shared anecdotes about Professor Balane: “In third year [of law school in Ateneo], he was my professor for Succession, his reputation in the UP College of Law as a teacher scared us to death. There were horrible stories about him, but as the semester in Succession unfolded, my batch mates and I began to wonder, ‘What is there to be scared about anyway?’”

When the time came to hear from the man of the hour, Prof. Balane enthralled colleagues and admirers in the packed Justitia Hall of the Ateneo Law School.

“I’d like to believe that in doing this, in writing this book, in holding this conference, we are planting the seed in the soil, hopeful that it will eventually sprout and grow and become a majestic tree with overarching branches and thick leaves,” he said, referring to the state of civil law in the Philippines.

“The important thing is not the one who buried the tree—what matters is the tree itself. A tree robustly alive because its roots draw nourishment from the live-giving waters of the civil law tradition which we got from Rome, and filtered through the Spanish experience,” he continued.

“So that is the book that I asked you to entertain with me as we go through these past three days. Not just for academic purposes, but more importantly because this is one way that we can serve our beloved country,” he ended.

Dean’s Corner

By JOSE MARIA G. HOFILEÑA

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of Associate Dean for Academic Affairs with Associate Dean Maita V. Chan-Gonzaga carrying out the responsibility of focusing on academic and faculty matters of the Juris Doctor degree program and the reconstitution of the Fr. Joaquin G. Bernas Center for Continuing Legal Education and Research into an institute that will oversee the school’s non-degree education programs, project, and activities under the leadership of its Executive Director, Atty. Lily K. Gruba.

On the academic front, we saw the launching of a new volume on Obligations and Contracts by our esteemed Professor of Civil Law, Atty. Ruben F. Balane and yet another beginning in the academe for the six new enrollees of our Master of Laws degree program administered by our Graduate Legal Studies Institute spearheaded by Atty. Ampy Sta. Maria.

At the national level, a former faculty member of the law school, Atty. Meynard Guevarra, was appointed as Secretary of Justice, a public service position of great influence and responsibility, both to our country and to the Ignatian values we have all pledged to uphold.

And of course, there was the beginning of a fresh new academic year, in preparation for which the faculty took time out for relaxation and some planning at the Balesin Island Club.

While indeed there are endings and there are beginnings, from where I sit, the beginnings have outnumbered the endings.

It is in the opportunity to directly help in the shaping and embracing of new beginnings that better serve the objectives of our community that I am energized to take on my new tasks. I look forward to working with all of our Ateneo Law School stakeholders so that together we can bring ourselves triumphantly to the fulfillment of our mission.
Ateneo Law School hosts workshop on disaster displacement in the Asia Pacific

By the UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE

The ATENEO LAW School has taken part in a study led by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law called “Protecting Persons Displaced in the Context of Disasters in Asia Pacific: A Human Rights-Based Approach to Law, Policy and Practice in Ten Countries.” The research project, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), was conceptualized as a response to the inconsistent way that displacement is addressed on national and sub-regional legal and policy frameworks.

Through its Graduate Legal Studies Institute, the ALS hosted a two-day authors’ workshop from July 4–5, 2018, welcoming participants from different countries in the Asia Pacific region to discuss the results of the initial phase of the research. The participants provided a glimpse of the different case studies that show situations of displacement in their respective countries, and how law and policy respond to these situations.

The research project sets out to address two questions: 1) what states in the Asia Pacific region are doing to address contemporary challenges relating to displacement in the context of disasters and 2) how internationally-articulated frameworks relating to the protection of persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change can translate into enhanced protection on the ground.

The session in Manila involved discussions on a human rights-based approach to disaster displacement, understanding the role of law and policy in the case studies, and identifying and applying international and national legal frameworks to the case studies.

The group will reconvene in December 2018 in the form of an international symposium where academics and other stakeholders are expected to attend. The research, ultimately, aims to produce both an academic edited volume as well as a set of country studies translated into local languages that can be used for policy reform and development in disaster risk reduction and management.

Participating institutions include the Department of Law, Independent University (Bangladesh); Centre for the Study of Humanitarian Law, Royal University of Law and Economics (Cambodia); Faculty of Law, East Yangon University (Myanmar); School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia); School of Law, Ateneo de Manila University; Centre for Social Development Studies, Chulalongkorn University (Thailand); Law Faculty Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology (Vanuatu); Faculty of Law, University of the South Pacific (Solomon Islands); and Centre for the Study of Human Rights, Nankai University (China).
The Ateneo Law School welcomes to its fold six new students under the Master of Laws (LL.M.) Program this academic year. ALS welcomes back alumni Jose Marlon P. Pabiton (J.D. ’05) and Enriquito L. Cruz (J.D. ’16) who enlisted in the International Economic Law and Intellectual Property Law Tracks, respectively. Attty. Pabiton is currently engaged in private practice and teaches at the Far Eastern University Institute of Law, while Atty. Cruz is an associate at the Sapalo Velez Bundang & Bullian Law Offices.

Atty. Ramiila L. Quinto and Atty. Jan Raphael R. Salud are in the International Corporate and Business Law Track. Atty. Quinto completed her LL.B. at San Beda College in 2012 and is an associate at the Puno & Peñarroyo Law Offices. Atty. Salud obtained his LL.B. at San Beda College – Alabang in 2013 and is currently the Vice Chair of the Commercial Law Department of De La Salle University – Manila’s College of Business. Also joining the current roster of LL.M. students under the Intellectual Property Law Track is Atty. Richard C. Siga-an who finished his law degree at the Philippine Law School in 2003 and was formerly with the Philippine Air Force.

ALS also welcomes its third international student under the LL.M. Program – Atty. Jihwan Kang (South Korea). He completed his law degree at the Chonbuk National University in 2014. Prior to coming to ALS to study International Human Rights Law, Atty. Kang practiced law in Korea.

He is a junior partner at the Law Firm of Yoolhyun.

The Graduate Legal Studies Institute (GLSI) held the orientation for new LL.M. students on 11 August 2018, at the Bernas Seminar Room. ALS Dean Jose Maria G. Hofileña welcomed the new students and emphasized that they are as much a part of the ALS community as the law students. Dean Hofileña also shared with the students the vision, mission, and goals of the ALS. APS Chaplain Fr. IJ Chan-Gonzaga, S.J. talked about the Ateneo culture and Ignatian spirituality and how these can help them in their careers and lives, especially as they go back to student life.

During the orientation, Atty. Ryan Jeremiah D. Quan of the GLSI discussed the new rules and policies of the LL.M. Program and academic opportunities at ALS’ foreign partner institutions. Atty. Amparita Sta. Maria, GLSI Director, gave an introduction to the LL.M. Thesis Program and shared the 2018 Revised Thesis Rules.

Atty. Michelle Recto, who finished her LL.M. at ALS in 2016, shared her student experiences. She provided tips on completing requirements, engaging with professors, and balancing professional life while studying. Atty. Recto also related how her year-long journey as an LL.M. student and completing her degree helped advance her career.
Four APMA Students Complete their Regional Semester in ALS

By the GRADUATE LEGAL STUDIES INSTITUTE

THE FOURTH COHORT (Academic Year 2017 – 2018) of the Master of Arts in Human Rights and Democratization – Asia Pacific Program (APMA) concluded their regional semester at the Ateneo Law School in June 2018. The cohort is composed of M.T. Erandika Kumudumalee de Silva (Sri Lanka), Mahmud Hassan (Bangladesh), Nir Lama (Nepal), and Worapon Rattanawarawong (Thailand). At ALS, they were enrolled in two courses – Emerging Issues in Human Rights and Institutions and Mechanisms for Human Rights Promotion and Protection. The students also prepared and defended their theses under the supervision of Ateneo faculty members.


Ma. Lourdes Veneracion-Rallonza, PhD advised Hasan (The Challenges of Non-Government Organizations in Providing Reproductive Health Services to Internally Displaced Persons: A Case Study on the Marawi, Philippines Experience) and Rattanawarawong (Being LGBT at The Borders: A Study On Human Rights Violations and Discriminations Against LGBT Youths in The Deep South of Thailand) in the course of their thesis writing.

After defending their theses, the students also presented their research findings in a forum held on June 29, 2018.

Some of the students also spent part of their semesters interning at human rights-related agencies, such as the Commission on Human Rights, Kaisahan para sa Kaunlaran ng Kanayunan at Repormang Pansakahan, and Initiatives for Dialogue and Empowerment through Alternative Legal Services, Inc.

The program is part of the European Union-supported Global Campus of Human Rights, which has campuses in Europe, South East Europe, Africa, Asia Pacific, Caucasus, Latin America and the Carribean, and the Arab World. The Asia Pacific Program is administered by Mahidol University of Thailand where the students spend their first semester. The students then enroll at either the Ateneo, Universitas Gadjah Mada (Indonesia), Kathmandu School of Law (Nepal), or the University of Colombo (Sri Lanka) for their second semester. At Ateneo, the program is taught by faculty from ALS, Department of Political Science, and Sociology and Anthropology Department.
To finish law school in and of itself is a daunting task. But there are students who not only finish law school but finish strong by garnering awards and commendations for their exemplary performance. Let us get to know how these graduates went above and beyond what was required of them as law students.

First up is Sean Borja, who is this year’s Valedictorian. The Valedictorian award or the Gold Medal for Academic Excellence is given to the student who obtained the highest general weighted average throughout law school. Beyond his impeccable academic performance, he still found time to join and be active in the Ateneo Society for International Law or ASIL. Through ASIL, Sean joined various Moot Court Competitions like the Stetson Moot Court Competition, World Trade Organization Moot Court Competition, Asia Cup Moot Court Competition, and the Jessup Moot Court Competition. Sean honestly believes that joining ASIL was his best decision in law school.

When asked for tips on how to do well in law school, Sean replied that aside from putting in the work and time to study, there is a need to rid oneself of any sense of entitlement while going through law school. To do well in law school, students need to have the mindset that they will never deserve anything by default. According to him, if students have this mindset, they will be able to tackle law school with all the effort they can muster and they will know in their heart that it will be worth it.

To survive law school, Sean gave three tips. First is to embrace the “art of small steps.” In his four years, he found that law school was really just a test of resilience, rather than of natural brilliance. It is not about who had the highest grades in college, it is about who had the will to go through the daily grind without wearing down. He reminds that lawyers are made, not born. Second, do not forget to be human. Live, laugh, and love. It is important for students to meet their daily reading quotas, sure, but they should never forget to spend time with the people who matter to them. Sean’s third and final tip is to do it (survive law school) for the good people. He says that law school will tire you out if you do it for yourself alone. When you run out of fuel, look back and know that there is an entire barangay of people cheering you on. Do it for them, he says.

The Salutatorian award or the Silver Medal for Academic Excellence is given to the student who ranked second in the batch in terms of general weighted average throughout the law course. The Salutatorian of Class 2018 is none other than Madelyn Ong. Second in the batch she may be but make no mistake, Madz is second to none in terms of poise and wit. On top of academics, she found time to join various organizations such as the St. Thomas More Debate Society (now known as the Ateneo Law Debate and Advocacy Society or ALDAS). She was also the former president of the Ateneo Law and Business Association (ALBA).

For Madz, to do well means three things. First, no shortcuts. She suggests reading the originals of cases and textbooks especially during the first year. These helped her remember things for the long-term. Reading digests and reviewers might be able to help a student for one recitation, but there is no replacement for reading the full texts in the long run. Second, rest. Students should always make sure they get enough sleep. Madz always allots at least eight hours a day to sleep, except when during exam season. Also, she adds, try to have one free day during the week when...
you can just rest and spend time on things other than school. This will keep one from feeling burnt-out.

Madz’s final tip is to try harder every day. In her own words: “It doesn’t get easier, you only get better.” Indeed, as you get used to the daily struggle, the temptation to slack off also gets stronger. Do not let that keep you from giving your 100%. As you get better, up your game a little and work a bit harder.

Last but not the least in this list of exceptional students is Colene Arcaina, the recipient of this year’s Roberto Gana Award for Service. The Roberto Gana Award for Service is given to the student who embodied Atty. Roberto Gana’s devotion to service as counselor and friend to the underprivileged members of our society. Colene was one such student. With human rights at the helm of her advocacy, Colene was an active member of the Ateneo Human Rights Center (AHRC) serving as the President in her final year. With the AHRC, she helped organize and participated in various events both in and outside school, such as immersions with our Aeta brothers and sisters, paralegal training on different human rights topics, Women’s Week, Pride Week, and various mobilizations and rallies. She was also a member of the Ateneo Law School Choir and the Campus Ministry Office both of which serve in the regular Saturday mass at the St. Thomas More Chapel in the Ateneo Law School.

Colene also had a few things to say on doing well in Law School. Like Madz, Colene suggests to read the originals of cases to help remember them come review classes; some cases will really stick to you like stories from your closest friends. She also suggests reading and understanding the code provisions and making your own notes on cases and provisions. Another tip Colene had is to associate concepts with one another and always ask yourself to illustrate. The goal is always this: How will a person not studying the law understand this? In answering exams, simplicity is always the key and one should never overthink. Colene also stressed the importance of taking breaks. It is, after all, important to study hard, but also to study smart.

More than just studying hard and smart, Colene’s final tip involves reading the news and being well-acquainted with current events. It is important now and then to break free from the law school bubble in order to be able to apply what you have learned. Breaking free from the law school bubble also means being always teachable and open to new experiences.

Law school is hard enough as it is but the way these students conquered it was truly magis. They not only made their mark in law school through their academic excellence but went beyond, joining organizations and pursuing advocacies they were truly passionate about. May all students learn from and be inspired by how Sean, Madz, and Colene performed beyond the ordinary.

Colene (standing) on immersion with the Aeta community.

**Cesario A. Azucena: A Tribute**

By RET. JUSTICE ADOLFO S. AZCUNA

ATTY. CESAR Azucena is one of my unforgettable classmates in Ateneo Law Class 1962. From day one, Cesar was a devoted, studious and reliable scholar of the law. He also is, and has been, an equally devoted, studious and reliable friend.

I remember how he subtly, or not so subtly, persuaded his graduation class to choose me for their graduation speaker. I cherish that singular honor because that was the graduating class that would become the first lawyers of the millennium.

I also had the invariable practice of citing Cesar’s book on Labor Laws whenever I penned a Supreme Court decision on labor law. This was not because he was a friend and classmate but simply because his book was the best (and often the latest) in the market. Of course he was quick to cite my decisions in the subsequent editions of his book.

Congratulations, then, to Atty. Cesar Azucena, for an accolade of recognition long due to him for his distinguished career as Author and Teacher of the law.

From all of us in Ateneo Law ‘62: Hail Cesar! Mabuhay kayo!
Habemus Decanum!

by RUBEN F. BALANE

Life’s rhythms are most often smooth flows: slow, quiet, imperceptible. That is true even of the life of law schools. So smooth is the flow that many times it is hard to tell which direction it is going. But, once in a while - a long while it often is - there is a kind of punctuation: the river bends, or changes the rate of its flow, accelerating or decelerating because the bed has become deeper or shallower. Nothing - not rivers, not law schools - remains perpetually the same.

A time of punctuation has come to the Ateneo Law School, when a new man has come at the helm. It is a time for appraising the past and anticipating the future. Where have we been, and where are we going?

First, looking back: what can be said of the Candelaria deanship? What kind of dean was Sedfrey Candelaria? An instant answer might be that, during his tenure, more students wanted to take their law course here and more law teachers applied to join its faculty. Or that the school calendar was modified to conform to international and, particularly, ASEAN schedules. Those are correct observations, but a bit too facile, and therefore superficial. Numbers and dates, though relevant, do not really tell the story of people or institutions.

Obviously, taking stock of a deanship that has hardly slipped into the past is a risky business since this early, one has neither the perspective nor the objectivity that only time can give. One can only attempt to identify some potential milestones along the road travelled in the past seven years, by which Dean Sedfrey’s stewardship will in all likelihood be evaluated and measured. Of these milestones two stand out: the first is the introduction of the tracking system, by which students may choose a specific area of concentration in the second half of the law course. The second is the establishment of international linkages with law schools in various countries (Coventry in Britain, Kyushu in Japan, Málaga in Spain). These, by all indications, are major undertakings, radical and far-reaching. Obviously, taking stock of a deanship that has hardly slipped into the past is a risky business since this early, one has neither the perspective nor the objectivity that only time can give. One can only attempt to identify some potential milestones along the road travelled in the past seven years, by which Dean Sedfrey’s stewardship will in all likelihood be evaluated and measured. Of these milestones two stand out: the first is the introduction of the tracking system, by which students may choose a specific area of concentration in the second half of the law course. The second is the establishment of international linkages with law schools in various countries (Coventry in Britain, Kyushu in Japan, Málaga in Spain). These, by all indications, are major undertakings, radical and far-reaching. Of him, one can only ask the question which at present has no answer. What kind of dean will he be? Perhaps the only possible riposte to that question is Matthew Arnold’s oft-quoted line: “Only the event will teach us in its hour.”

But whatever unfolds, the reception that awaits him is not apprehension (far from it) but a confident optimism and an enthusiasm that the Ateneo Law School will, in its journey under his steerage, continue to grow and scale higher levels of excellence and achieve deeper strata of service and commitment to Philippine society.

We know that his years as dean are not going to be a stroll in the moonlight. The people he will be dealing with will be various - of every stripe and color. He knows (perchance with some healthy trepidation) that leading is a tricky enterprise; it will need tweaking, nudging, persuading, cajoling (some of the time), inspiring, and always walking together. Doubtless, he will have his own priorities: some existing programs will be confirmed and continued, some may be modified, some may be redirected or even abandoned. And some new flagships may be launched. He will act according to his best lights, for the good of the school.

We do not know where his best lights will lead us, certainly not in the specifics. But, if his personality and professional record are any indicators, we can assume - safely and securely - that his best lights are going to be bright indeed.

And so, from our hearts, we salute both Dean Sedfrey and Dean Joey: Macte Virtute!
Commencement Speech: 72nd Commencement Exercises

By FR. BIENVENIDO F. NEBRES, S.J.

DR. ANTONETTE Palma-Angeles, Vice President for the Ateneo Professional Schools, Dean Jose Maria G. Hoflieña, Dean Sedfrey M. Candelaria, Dean Manuel M. Dayrit, Associate Deans Ma. Nginga Teresa V. Chan-Gonzaga and Giovanni F. Vallente; Administrators, faculty and staff of the Ateneo Law School; parents, family, friends, and loved ones of our graduating class; the Ateneo Law School Class of 2018, good afternoon.

Congratulations to our Ateneo de Manila School of Law Graduates of 2018. Congratulations to the Master of Laws graduates. Congratulations to the Juris Doctor graduates. After four long years of college and four longer years of law school, here you are, proud Ateneo Lawyers — almost.

Congratulations and thanks to those who made your day of triumph possible; above all, your parents and your family. My thanks to the deans, the administrators, the faculty — who may have made life difficult for you on many a day but whom I hope you will thank when you face the Bar Examinations — the staff who took good care of you and, of course, your batchmates with whom you shared the joys and struggles of law school.

In preparation for this Commencement Address I had the opportunity of meeting with eight of you: Trinca, Colene, Chris, Mitch, Paula and Luisa, Marianne, and Kathleen.

I asked them to share about where you are and of your hopes and fears for the future. Where you are, of course, is joy and relief that law school is over — no more feared recitations or exams. But also much anxiety — as you still have the Bar Examinations in November. Our conversation kept going back and forth between your hopes and expectations, life after the Bar Exams, and anxiety over the next five months preparing for the Bar and six more months of waiting for the results.

You are right, of course, to be anxious about the Bar Exams. I will not tell you that you are Ateneo; we have given you the best education and the Bar Exams should be a cinch. Because you know it will be a challenge. Though, of course, have to ensure that you can take care of yourself and your family. Your family has many hopes and expectations for you. Each of you also has your own passion and dreams for your future.

We then talked about seeking to make a difference for our country. You spoke of your worries and concerns for our country, of joining rallies and often feeling frustration and helplessness. You spoke of positions that may become open to you in government, where you want to make a difference. But then you see Ateneo Law alumni in these positions — and you do not see them living out the values you have learned in law school. You wonder if you can be different.

I was reminded of a meeting with Ateneo graduates from Christian Life Community (CLC) many years ago. One of them said that his officemates would invite him for inuman after work — and he always declined. One of his officemates said, “Anak, ganyan ka kasi bata ka pa. Pero huwag kang mag-alala, hindi magtatagal magining kasing-bulok ka rin namin.” They asked — “paano kami hindi magising bulok din?”

You asked, “Don’t they know what they need to do? Why don’t they do it? Don’t they see the effects of their choices on so many people?”

I have a Russian-American neuroscientist friend in New York City, Elkhonon Goldberg, whom I met in a conference in Sydney in 2000. We keep in touch and I discuss with him the neuroscience of our choices, what we choose to do or not do. In one conversation, I shared: “We know the painful numbers: 3.7 million or 30% of Filipino children 0-5 years old are stunted. The number of extremely poor and hungry is still around 26% — Indonesia has brought it down to below 10%; Vietnam, even after their war, brought it to below 15%. Economist Ciel Habito says that, yes, our GDP growth is among the best, but 76% of that growth has been going to the 40 richest families. We know these realities. Why do we not act on them?”

Dr. Goldberg said, “It is not the frontal neo-cortex, the rational, thinking brain, that moves us to action. It is the emotional, the feeling brain, the limbic system that moves us to action.” And it is moved, not by rational knowledge, but by meeting real people in need and caring for them. So the values you learned in the Ateneo Law School are important but, in the face of pressure, they may not be enough.

I was Dean of Ateneo College from 1973-80 and knew Fr. Jett Villarin, SJ, VP Tonette Angeles, and Deans Sedfrey Candelaria and Mel Sta. Maria as college students. I worked
hard with that generation of Ateneans to engage martial law and we look back with pride to the role we played in EDSA 1986 and the restoration of democracy in our country. That was also the time when the Ateneo College sought to respond to the call of the graduating class of 1968 to go “Down from the Hill,” and to Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J.’s call to be “Men and Women for Others.” We established the Office of Social Concern and Involvement (OSCI) and entered the lives of the urban and rural poor.

In the struggle to end martial law, we always kept two clear goals in mind: First, the restoration of democracy, and second, social reform to improve the lives of the poor.

After Ninoy’s assassination in 1983, businessmen and leaders from the elite finally began to engage Martial Law. They invited me to speak in seminars and meetings and I said we would work with them towards the restoration of democracy, but asked that they then work with us on social reform on behalf of the poor. They said yes. This scenario repeated when they would get rattled during every coup attempt, which was happening every year from 1986 until 1990.

But once the crisis passed and business became better, the concerns of the poor were forgotten. I realized then that they — and we — are too far above the majority of our people and so are emotionally disconnected from them. The needs of the majority poor do not press persistently on us. They are crowded out by the pressures of our middle class worlds.

In 1991 I was asked to offer reflections on EDSA, five years after. I said that EDSA was a Transfiguration experience — we sang “Handog ng Pilipino sa Mundo” and saw ourselves shining in light, like Jesus and the apostles on Mount Tabor. But then as in the Gospels, we had to go down the mountain and, like the apostles faced with the epileptic boy, we had to confront the realities of poverty, sickness, and corruption and, like them, we failed the test.

It would not be through more Transfiguration experiences that the apostles would be transformed. It would be through Good Friday and the Cross.

**FIRST, WE GO DOWN FROM THE HILL.**

Following my neuroscientist friend, I ask you then to first go down from the hill and encounter (a favorite word of Pope Francis) our people.

Maybe work with an NGO, but I ask you, in particular, to consider local government. Not necessarily that you will immediately make a lot of difference there. But at least you will encounter the reality of the majority of our people. You will find that as early as 5:00 a.m., nakapila na ang mga mahihirap sa bahay ng mayor. May reseta para sa maysakit na anak, humihining ng pamabayad sa libing, o para sa matrikula ng anak.

Like the apostles before the epileptic boy, you will find yourself helpless. I have felt helpless, too. But their faces and stories have stayed with me and moved me to continue to find ways to help them. So too with you. When the day comes that you will be in a position to make a difference — and that day will come — their faces and stories will remind you why you must remain true to your Ateneo Law School ideals.

I remember being asked by the principal of Payatas B Annex Elementary School many years ago if we could donate Christmas food packs for the 400 poorest families in her school. We gave just a 100-peso food pack — noodles, sardines. She said, “This will last a family of five 3 days, because they only eat once a day and not much.” I was stunned. As we were leaving, one woman approached me and said, “Sana pagkalooban kayo ng Diyos ng mahabang buhay para marami pa ang inyong matutulungan.” Her words and her face continue to haunt me until today.

Dr. Carmela Oracion of the Ateneo Center for Educational Development (ACED) and I have been working with the public schools for many decades. Like most people we began assuming that they needed teacher training, teaching materials, and so forth. But as we spent more time with the teachers and asked what prevents the children from coming to school or from doing well in school, they said, “Gutom sila.” In one school in Parañaque, one Grade 4 boy fainted. When he regained consciousness he said, “Ah, Huwebes pala.” The family is so poor that they take turns not eating. Thursdays he does not eat.

**BUT HOW CAN WE ADDRESS THE HUNGER OF SO MANY?**

The apostles asked this of Jesus before he multiplied the loaves and the fish to feed 5,000.

Is there a way, other than asking God for miracles, to address the hunger of many? Several years ago I commissioned a research study led by Dr. Bopeep Saloma of the Ateneo Sociology Department to find what works in scaling up reform to address poverty and hunger. They found that it is not by introducing new structures, but in helping existing institutions to fulfill their functions and enabling different actors and groups to interact and work together in more effective ways.

Let me tell you then our experience of multiplying loaves and fish, not through miraculous powers, but through working with different institutions and actors towards a shared goal of making a difference on hunger.

Last June 20 the President signed into law Republic Act (RA) 11037, a bill entitled “Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pinoy.” It mandates providing a meal for 120 days for children 3-5 years old in daycare centers and for undernourished children in K-6. For this year there is a national budget of Php 3 billion for daycare and over Php 5 billion for K-6. Enough, if well-implemented, for the most malnourished. This is a milestone institutionalizing a program to address malnutrition for millions of Filipino children.

Yet not enough to address chronic hunger or to take care of babies in the first 1,000 days, but a major step forward. We still have to work on the implementing rules and regulations and maybe you can help us there.

RA 11037 is the culmination of a journey that actually started several years ago from the ground. Eleven years ago, in 2007, Jollibee Foundation started Busog, Lusog, Talino (BLT) providing lunch for the 40 most malnourished children in selected public schools. Ateneo partnered with Jollibee for the public schools in our network.

Two years after, in 2009, Ateneo scaled up to 400 malnourished children for Bagong Silangan Elementary school. This was to respond to the persistent requests of the principal who told us that half of her 4,000 children were malnourished and regularly hungry.

In 2010, as a parting gift for my coming retirement, the Law School and other Professional Schools committed to raise funds to provide lunch for 4,000 children, 1,000 each in 4 Quezon City (QC) schools. This provided the opportunity for a breakthrough innovation, developed by Dr. Oracion. She built a Central Kitchen to prepare lunch for the 4,000 schoolchildren. It was staffed by volunteer nanays and tatays. The principal of the lead school and the QC DepEd Division readily gave their support because Ateneo had been working with them for many years.

In 2012 then Mayor Sherwin Gatchalian of Valenzuela City saw the QC kitchen and asked Ateneo to design and manage a Central Kitchen for all the daycare centers and elementary schools of Valenzuela City. He said, “I have always wanted to do this, but did not know how. How can I sleep soundly, knowing so many children in my city are hungry and malnourished.” This remains our biggest Central Kitchen, providing meals for 16,000 to 18,000 children every school day.
Gawad Kalinga (GK) went to Leyte in 2014 after Yolanda and the people said, “Thank you for thinking of building homes for us. Pero baka pagdaging ng aming bahay, patay na kami sa gutom.” So GK started Kusina ng Kalinga to provide meals for several thousand children in several towns in Leyte, following the Ateneo Blueplate model.

After the SAF 44 tragedy in early 2015, Kusina ng Kalinga started providing lunch for children in the evacuation centers in Maguindanao and then to start school feeding in Mamasapano and Rajah Buayan.

When the Marawi war started in May 2017, the DepEd in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) asked a GK team to build a Kusina ng Kalinga in Saguiaran, the town nearest Marawi, where most of the evacuees from Ground Zero had gone. The team was shocked to find out that Saguiaran was very near Ground Zero and they could hear, see, and feel the bombings and exchange of gunfire. Concern for the safety of the kitchen team made them hesitate to go ahead, but the young team leader, Gabie Tomboc, said: “We can hear the bombing and the gunfire. But we can also see and hear the children. We should just decide who we will listen to. I think we should listen to the children.” They started providing meals as soon as Ramadan ended in June 2017.

Encounter and love for the children overcame all fear.

Today, GK Kusina ng Kalinga is providing lunch for all the schoolchildren in Marawi. Jollibee BLT, Ateneo Blueplate and GK Kusina ng Kalinga provide lunch for over 100,000 children, with over 20,000 in ARMM, including all the schoolchildren in Marawi.

With lawmakers at the top and nanays on the ground, as we were expanding kitchens on the ground together with mayors and DepEd officials, we also worked: with Senator Bam Aquino, the author of the school feeding bill; with Senator Chiz Escudero, Chair of the Senate Committee on Education, who shepherded the bill to final passage; with Senator Grace Poe, whom I invited to visit the Valenzuela kitchen after her impassioned speech on child hunger in the Senate; and with Senator Gatchalian, who championed the project as Mayor. A key proponent in Congress is Ateneo Law School alumnus, Congressman Raul del Mar, who joined us for an “End Hunger Summit” in Cebu.

But the day-to-day heroes are our kitchen managers and the nanays and tatays and other volunteers, who are up every school day at 3:00 or 4:00 a.m. to cook the meals and wash the dishes after, and the principals and teachers who give generously of their time to supervise the children and distribute the food. Because of their volunteer work, the cost per meal in Metro Manila is only 11.50 pesos and in the provinces 15 pesos. Their generosity also allows the principals and teachers to focus on their mission of teaching. I invite these nanays and tatays to speak to a sophomore class I teach in Loyola. When my students ask why they sacrifice so much without remuneration, they say, “Inisip namin kung hindi kami gigising, baka hindi kumain ang mga bata. Parang anak na rin namin sila.”

Today the expansion of the Central Kitchen model for school feeding no longer depends only on Ateneo, GK and Jollibee. Governor Arturo Uy of Compostela Valley is building in all the towns of Compostela Valley. Governor Hilario Davide of Cebu is leading the mayors of Cebu Province. The DepEd Division in Nueva Ecija is doing it for the towns of Nueva Ecija. Mayor Alexander Pajarillo of Mercedes is leading mayors of Camarines Norte. DepEd ARMM got a standing ovation in one recent seminar when they showed how they had built central kitchens all over ARMM.

A friend in education reform told me once that successful reform is like infecting the system with a good virus. There is a slow latent period and then rapid expansion following an exponential curve. We have passed the inflection point and are now on the upward curve.

I have told you this story at some length in the hope that you may learn that successful reform comes from bringing together many actors and institutions to work towards a shared goal.

If the journey seems long, it was a happy and fulfilling one. There was fulfillment in every new kitchen built, in seeing more children with happy faces, in getting to know more mayors discovering the joy of caring for and serving their people.

I have a favorite quote from the German political philosopher Isaiah Berlin: “Men do not only live by fighting evils. They live by positive goals.”

We do not move forward by bemoaning our weaknesses. We move forward by building on our strengths. My story tells you that you will find that strength on the ground: in amazing nanays and tatays, immensely dedicated mayors, governors, DepEd superintendents, supervisors, principals, and teachers.

We do not lack good people on the ground. Just think of all our Overseas Filipino Workers who sacrifice so much and who are actually propping up the economy from which you and I benefit. What we lack are leaders at the top who engage them with love and respect and create the linkages to bring their potential to reality.

Yes, I hope your batch will have the opportunity to serve in high positions, where you can make a difference. What I am asking you to consider is to move to the top through a road less travelled, beginning on the ground and getting to know and love our people. You will then have the heart to use your learning and skills to truly serve — because for you they will have faces and names and stories and you know you cannot fail them.

Before I end, your eight representatives reminded me to tell you that, yes, you still have to pass the Bar.

So until November, focus on each day of your review. Don’t waste energy worrying about November. It will come and you will be ready if you spend your time preparing well.

Remember that you are not alone. You have your family, your batchmates and the Ateneo community with you. Keep your cool. Yes, you are stressed. No need to stress your family and friends, too. Be there for one another, support and encourage one another.

Remember to pray. Be of good courage and put your trust in God who loves you. I was also told to remind you that you have six months after the Bar Examinations before you get the results and with God’s grace take your oath to be fully lawyers.

I invite you to join me in getting to know our country and people better. Join me in visits to Marawi and Maguindanao and get to know and become friends with mayors and leaders. I have been working with the mayors and schools since 2004 and Ateneo has a good name with them. To Regional Governor Mujiv Hataman and Marawi Mayor, Majul Gandamra, I am Fr. Ben. The ARMM DepEd Secretary Rasol Mitmug is Ateneo College 2001 and Ateneo Law School 2006.

Watch the children playing football, volleyball, rugby — sports programs developed by Ateneo and GK. You will find children of rebels happily playing with children of soldiers. Beside you watching will be families of rebels and families of soldiers. You will find that there is a deep and lasting joy from coming to know our people.

And you will be ready to be the Ateneo Lawyer, who will lead and serve our country, keeping true to the ideals of the Ateneo Law School.

Congratulations again to your parents and family, to the Ateneo Law School administrators, faculty, and staff, and, above all, to you, the Ateneo de Manila School of Law Class of 2018.

May our Lord and our Lady watch over you in the coming months before the Bar Exams and in the many years of service and achievement that lie ahead of you.
Inside the classroom — Assoc. Dean Maita Chan-Gonzaga and Atty. Benjie Lerma (standing center), with their advisory class this year (2019-B).

The face behind the Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

By OSCAR CARLO F. CAJUCOM

As we welcome Ateneo Law School Dean Jose Maria G. Hofileña and look forward to the next several years in law school, we also welcome Associate Dean Ma. Ngina Teresa “Maita” V. Chan-Gonzaga’s appointment to the reinstated Office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs (OADAA).

Under the supervision of the Office of the Dean, the OADAA was established to evaluate, monitor, make recommendations on, and implement the academic aspects of the Juris Doctor (JD) degree program. This includes matters pertaining to the faculty, curriculum, academic standards, academic advisement and guidance, academic linkages, and academic resources.

Our law students’ academic development is one of the main concerns of OADAA. Of course the minimum objective is for students to pass their courses, maintain the required general weighted average, and eventually pass (and excel) in the Bar Examinations. But by no means should it end there. According to Assoc. Dean Maita, these academic standards should not be taken to mean that an Ateneo lawyer should only be about academic competence.

Assoc. Dean Maita thinks that our students’ training should prepare them for the Bar Exams, but not to the exclusion of other important objectives. She cites former ALS Dean Cesar L. Villanueva who said that: “ALS, as a responsible law school, takes the prospects of its graduates taking the Bar Examinations seriously, as any responsible law school should; but never to the exclusion of other primary responsibilities.” Thus, while there is no perfect formula for an ideal balance between preparing the students for the Bar and making sure they are equipped with the skills needed for practice and are par with international legal education standards, Assoc. Dean Maita suggests that it is important to always keep the school’s vision and identity in mind when contemplating any policy and/or curriculum review.

Since the OADAA is newly re-established, it would be natural to expect reforms or changes intended to be implemented. After all, this academic year is one of learning and transition for Dean Joey’s team of administrators. But it was quite a pleasant surprise to find out that some of these intended “changes” or improvements are already under way and have in fact been met to some extent. For one, Assoc. Dean Maita thanks the law faculty for rising to the occasion by timely resolving student appeals and submitting grades. For the first time in recorded history, there was no need for conditional enrollment. This

Assoc. Dean Maita Chan-Gonzaga shares a light moment with her advisory class last year (2018-B).
Assoc. Dean Maita fashion, lightheartedly to working with everyone, and, in typical education. As for the faculty, she looks forward lawyers get the most out of an Ateneo Law and help starry-eyed kids dreaming to be job? The opportunity to give back to Ateneo aimlessly.

I have a bit of time to travel,” she qualifies), she copes by planning her travels (“when of his old things). When it comes to stress, that she occupies his old space (and kept some Bernas, S.J.) former office.” She loves the fact … that I’ve been assigned Fr. B’s (Fr. Joaquin responsibilities, both moral and professional. They will also be resolute in carrying out their beliefs and convictions, and will see God in all things.” As members of the faculty, we should do our part to make sure this is realized. To do this, she suggests that faculty members should always be reliable and responsible, whether in attending class and submitting grades on time, or making sure we are prepared in class and updated with laws and jurisprudence. She also adds that faculty should ensure fairness imbued with cura personalis but without foregoing the high academic standards of the law school.

Now that we know all about the OADAA and Assoc. Dean Maita’s responsibilities, we take the time to get to know her a little better. A lot of people inspire her in her new position, but in her own words, “it certainly doesn’t hurt … that I’ve been assigned Fr. B’s (Fr. Joaquin Bernas, S.J.) former office.” She loves the fact that she occupies his old space (and kept some of his old things). When it comes to stress, she copes by planning her travels (for “when I have a bit of time to travel,” she qualifies), surfing the net for videos of cute dogs, “shoot the breeze” with her friends, and drive around aimlessly.

The best thing about Assoc. Dean Maita’s job? The opportunity to give back to Ateneo and help starry-eyed kids dreaming to be lawyers get the most out of an Ateneo Law education. As for the faculty, she looks forward to working with everyone, and, in typical Assoc. Dean Maita fashion, lightheartedly adds: “Bear with the newbie please.”

Island in the Sun: 2018 Faculty Development Seminar

By PATRICIA ANNE S. STA. MARIA

LAST JULY 7, 2018, the Law School faculty jetted off to Balesin Island Club for its annual Faculty Development Seminar. Located on an island of the same name in Polillo, Quezon Province, Balesin Island Club is probably most known for the seven villas which house the club’s guests. Each villa is modeled and named after an international location such as Mykonos in Greece, St. Tropez in France, and Bali in Indonesia. For the duration of the trip, the faculty stayed in Toscana, the villa modeled after the Tuscany region. This was a nice throw back to last year’s seminar, when the faculty spent a little over a week in Italy.

Upon arrival, the professors and their family members were led to their rooms to settle in. While some opted to relax and have breakfast at another villa, most of the contingent chose to take a tour through the island, riding vans and jeepneys to survey all the club had to offer. Lunch was served after the tour back in Toscana, and dinner later that night was had at Costa del Sol, the villa named after Spain’s coastal region.

Aside from treating themselves to some well-deserved relaxation, the faculty also had business to attend to. The second day of the seminar was highlighted by the faculty meeting, presided over by the new dean of the Law School, Dean Jose Maria G. Hofileen. On the agenda were the recently concluded Bar Exams, ways to improve teaching within the Law School, and the assistance extended to Bar examinees.

Other items on the agenda included the Law School’s continuing efforts to comply with the course standards promulgated by the Legal Education Board, as well as some matters regarding law admissions. Dean Hofileen concluded the session, and effectively the trip, by stating that he looked forward to the coming school year and to more opportunities to have the faculty members come together and enjoy each other’s company. No doubt that after the fun few days relaxing on the beaches of Balesin, all the faculty members shared the same sentiments.
Ateneo Law School holds 72nd Commencement Exercises

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Sedefrey M. Candelaria, former Dean of the Law School; Atty. Giovanni F. Vallente, Associate Dean for Student Affairs; and Atty. Ma. Ngina Teresa V. Chan-Gonzaga, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Sean James J. Borja, the Valedictorian of the batch, roused the hearts of his batchmates with an empowering graduation address. “This will come as no surprise to many of you: I am an openly homosexual law school student,” he said. Borja explained that being part of the LGBT community made him want to excel even further, to prove his worth, and to work twice as hard. “When I got to law school, I promised myself that I would push it to the very limit. I promised that if there was ever a path where I could become my best version, I would take that path and see how far someone like me could possibly go.”

He shared his experience being part of the Ateneo Society of International Law. Rigorous trainings often made him want to give up and quit. But he persevered and four years later, there he stood on the podium at the Meralco Theater, addressing his batch and giving them parting words.

Going out into the real world means having to make deep commitments. In his quest to ease his batchmates’ minds in making such commitments more meaningful, he identified three important points.

1. Remember the Myth of Sisyphus. For those not familiar with the myth, Sisyphus was cursed by the Greek gods to push a heavy boulder up a mountain. The catch, though, is that whenever he was able to reach the top of the mountain, the boulder comes rolling down the mountain. Sisyphus’ curse was to pick up the same boulder and bring it up the same mountain until the end of time. In life, we’re all going to have boulders to carry and as we make our way up our mountain, the world will be unrelenting in the failures and setbacks that will be in our way. When we fall off our mountain—the Bar Exams, or just even going out into the real world—I hope you remember Sisyphus and that the choice will always be ours. Either we let the boulder stay on the ground or pick up the boulder and aim for the sky. Failure is not a disability, it’s just a bruise, and a setback can be the perfect setup for a comeback if you just make it happen. Trust yourself, trust in the process, and know in your heart it will be worth it when you reach that summit.

2. Say no to entitlement. It doesn’t matter who you are. The world doesn’t stop for anybody, not even those who took up law. Let’s not be that person who waves the “abogado ako” flag as if it was our ticket to demand special treatment from anybody. And I mean anybody. Dispel the notion that we deserve respect, happiness, and all the other good things in life by default. Because as my mom and my dad taught me, anything worth it in life has to be fought hard and earned.

3. Do everything that you love for all the good people. It’s great to achieve things for ourselves, but when what and who we wake up for is ourselves alone, there will come a day when we’ll run out of energy and lose meaning in the things we do. Our dreams are fueled by the love and kindness that we get from the world, whether that be from somebody close or from a complete stranger. Have the sober recognition that we aren’t the only people making sacrifices here, and a lot of times, the people around us have made the bigger sacrifice just to see us get where we need to go. As we reach for the sky, never forget the people who would go through the nine circles of hell with us just to see us come through. Never forget the family and friends who have embraced and accepted us at our worst, and who have cheered us on without condition.

The afternoon’s commencement speaker was Fr. Bienvenido F. Nebres, S.J., Rector of the Jesuit Residences.

Speaking to a handful of graduating students in preparation for his address, Fr. Nebres asked them where they are in life and what their hopes and fears are for the future. There is relief, he said, as the students no longer have to deal with recitations and examinations. There is anxiety, as the Bar Exams still loom in November.

On passing the Bar, Fr. Nebres had this to say: “Many doors will open for you. You told me about law firms, about government positions, like in the Office of the Solicitor General, the road less travelled for some. You will, of course, have to ensure that you can take care of yourself and your family. Your family has many hopes and expectations for you. Each of you also has your own passion and dreams for your future.”

Fr. Nebres also discussed how to make a difference for the Philippines. “You spoke of your worries and concerns for our country,” he said, “of joining rallies and often feeling frustration and helplessness. You spoke of positions that may become open to you in government, where you want to make a difference. But then you see Ateneo Law alumni in these positions—and you do not see them living out the values you have learned in Law School.”

“You wonder if you can be different,” he added.

He told stories, many from his own experiences in working with Gawad Kalinga as well as the government in trying to provide hot meals for the hungry in various places in the country, including Marawi. He emphasized how all of this progress began from the ground, as Ateneo graduates started to go “down the hill.”

Fr. Nebres encouraged the graduates to work in NGOs, but perhaps most importantly, in local government.

He reminded the graduates that we do not move forward by bemoaning our weaknesses. “We move forward by building on our strengths.”

“Yes, I hope your batch will have the opportunity to serve in high positions, where you can make a difference,” he added. “What I am asking you to consider is to move to the top through a road less travelled, beginning at the ground and getting to know and love our people. You will then have the heart to use your learning and skills to truly serve—because for you they will have faces and names and stories and you know you cannot fail them.”

“I invite you to join me in getting to know our country and people better. You will find that there is a deep and lasting joy from coming to know our people.”

Fr. Nebres ended, “You will be ready to be the Ateneo Lawyer, who will lead and serve our country, keeping true to the ideals of the Ateneo Law School.”

Joining the Ateneo Law School J.D. Class of 2018 were eight graduates who were conferred with the Master of Laws (LL.M.) degree during the commencement exercises.