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GRADUATION 2018
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From the Director, Office of Alumni Relations

From the University President

GRADUATION 2018

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In Memoriam

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Specific things remain in my memory of that day I graduated from the Ateneo in 1991. At the Baccalaureate Mass, the responsorial psalm was “Ang Panginoon ay Aking Pastol.” At the graduation, my best friend Cholo Mallillin sang the school song, and I remember singing it as tears streamed down my face. Dr. Onofre Pagsanghan was our guest speaker, and I thought it such a privilege that he was the one chosen to speak to us. I had heard him before, in other places and spaces, but every time he spoke, he would always awake that fervor of hope and love in my heart. In millennial speak, I was always shookt.

A graduation is designed to commemorate the end of an achievement. But it is also designed as a pabaon of sorts: the last time the university has the chance to leave you with a message that it hopes you will carry all throughout your life. It is, for lack of a better expression, a branding. We brand you, emblazoned in your heart, an Atenean; and through the rituals that accompany the end, we brand you with words to protect you, guide you, a beacon of light for you as you go down from the hill.

I attend most of these graduations, because of work, but mostly because I enjoy it. It is hard to explain that I receive so much pleasure from attending. To attend the graduation is to stand as witness to the students, but also to the faculty and the school, to the triumph of all. I love best listening to the valedictory speeches and the messages of the special guests. The most refreshing to attend is always in the grade school, where the youngest of the students march in their crisp white polos, led by their homeroom teachers in matching colors, this year being gray. If you’re looking for hope, it’s easy to find it here, in their young faces.

Mark Lawrence Cruz, the speaker this year reminded them that the call to serve is always there. In fact, he reminded them that they had already responded to the call:

…this power to do the unthinkable is not new to you. You have done the same for children in Sitio Ruby where you read stories and worked on math lessons. You failed to study sometimes but you never failed to teach in Sitio Ruby! You did the same in MLQ Elementary School where you cooked and prepared meals for hundreds of kids even if you did not even cook or prepare your meals at home. Strangely, we are able to do the difficult and achieve the impossible if we do it for others and not for ourselves.

In these troubled, troubled times, these messages from our valedictorians and special guests remind me that there is a counter narrative to what is being peddled elsewhere. The world is full of fake news, tricksters, and false gods but one can turn away. I leave each graduation emboldened, held together again by a community that reminds me of my own brand, “for the greater glory of God.” I leave each graduation, breathing a bit better and ready to take on the world. It is our hope that this issue does the same for you.

Rica Bolipata-Santos, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
This July, the Fabiloh! team has decided to print out the Commencement Addresses of the past school year 2017-2018. All the speeches have inspired the new graduates to live the Ateneo ideals to be men-and-women-for-others. They are all messages of HOPE.

What struck me most specially were the speeches of our former University President, Fr. Bienvenido F. Nebres, SJ to the 2018 Ateneo de Manila Law School graduates last July 15, 2018 and the 2001 Class valedictorian, Ms. Roselle R. Ambubuyog to the graduating batch of the John Gokongwei School of Management and the School of Science and Engineering last May 25, 2018.

In his speech, Fr. Ben cites his neuroscientist friend, Dr. Elkhonon Goldberg, "It is not the frontal neocortex, the rational, the thinking brain, that moves us to action. It is the emotional, the feeling brain, the limbic system that moves us to action." Fr. Ben adds, "And it is moved, not by rational knowledge, but by meeting real people in need and caring for them."

What moves us to serve is the presence of love in our hearts by engaging (Fr. Ben’s favorite term) real people with real needs. Fr. Ben has engaged himself with the Gawad Kalinga projects and has coordinated with public officials in his effort to alleviate poverty and hunger in our country. He believes in the value of networking and in working within the present structures.

Images borne out from our past memories of personal encounters with the poor strike sensitive chords in our hearts. I remember in the mid-1990s when as a newly-ordained missionary priest in Bukidnon, we had a mass baptism in a far-flung barrio in the mountains. After the baptisms, while we were having the usual salu-salo with the children and their families, I saw a young native mother desperately putting too much food in her toddler’s mouth. Probably thinking that would save her child from hunger in the coming days, the child could not take the amount of food given him. He vomited the rice and the mother caught it with her hand. And then to my shock, she ate the vomit. She probably thought to herself, “Sayang ang suka ng anak ko. Pagkain din yun. Mabuti na rin ito kaysa wala.” This image stuck to my affective memory.
Ms. Roselle Ambubuyog’s speech depicted her own story. Blinded at age 6, she did not want originally to enrol at the Ateneo for fear of “prejudice and discrimination.” However, through her prayers and discernment process where God asked her questions for her to answer, she ended up as Class Valedictorian of her class, summa cum laude, majoring in Mathematics.

Hers was a story of resilience and courage especially after her father who used to accompany her in school, passed away last year tragically in an accident in their own home. After getting a call from Ateneo to invite her as this year’s commencement speaker, she cried because she knew that her father would not be present to listen to her.

Roselle has entered into the specialized field of Access Technology developing screen savers for smartphones on different apps and platforms for the blind. For those who have multiple disabilities, she designed a Braille interface for mobile screen readers allowing them to participate in social media. Her invention has also given hope for the blind veterans from the war in Afghanistan.

From the story of Roselle and the inspiring stories shared by Fr. Ben, we cannot not HOPE and we are reminded of St. Paul’s words:

Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.
—ROMANS 5:2-5

This is the Ateneo Way. We are not ridiculed with our Hope because of God’s Love in our hearts. We are happy in our sufferings in pursuing our commitments that build in us endurance and character. We hope to be significant, to see the “light in the dark” knowing that all these efforts are meant for his Greater Glory in the manner that He chooses.

Let us continue to tell stories of HOPE that inspire others to serve especially the poor and the needy.

Mabuhay ka, Atenista!

Norberto Ma. L. Bautista, SJ
Director, Office of Alumni Relations
Every year, the Ateneo de Manila University celebrates a total of nine graduations. Quite many and, truth be told, when it begins (it begins in March with the grade school and ends in November with the School of Government), I’m always a bit overwhelmed because I have to attend all. :)

But, I will have to say, it is deliciously heartening to attend an Ateneo graduation, to shake hands with each and every person, to meet parents and families, to be surrounded by faces of love, hope and joy. Graduations are times of thanksgiving as young people mark the end of one stage of their lives and look forward to the next.

This issue of Fabilioh! features the commencement speeches and a homily from the different academic units, including the valedictory addresses of the young men and women chosen to represent their class. I am glad that you will have the opportunity to read each valedictory address and homily, and in a way become a part of one of the highlights of life here at the Ateneo.

What might we glean from the messages of our valedictorians? From grade school to law school, our valedictorians remind us to be thankful always. Gratitude is a confession of the graciousness of life. Although we all seem to go it alone at times, no one ever gets to graduation under his or her own steam. Law school valedictorian Sean Borja reminded his batchmates: “…the next time we find ourselves struggling to push our boulders up the mountain, when our body is ready to let go, remember that there is an entire barangay behind you, and that you are not alone.”

And as for our guest speakers, a common thread was the summons to engage the world and live for others. At the senior high graduation, Toym Imao took out a light saber and said: “you can use to wield your metaphorical sword in whatever form it takes as long as it is tempered by the truth and forged with your pursuit of justice.”

Indeed, no matter how far we are now from that moment when we ourselves went down from the hill, there is always something about the Ateneo to quicken our hearts. Through these graduation words, I invite you to remember the Ateneo that has never left you, the alma mater that you never really left.
Let me close here with how I closed the 2018 graduation for Loyola Schools:

We already had our pabaons the other day. I just wish to burn in your souls that picture of a girl carrying a Philippine flag, drenched in the rain, going against the flood stream. My caption to that picture: Enlarge your heart.

Widen your embrace. Mind the things that contract your heart. Fear, cynicism, apathy. These constrict and shrink the heart. Enlarge your heart by exercising it to love. Widen your embrace by training your arms to lift others. Don’t just love someone who can love you back. Don’t just love someone who is loveable; that’s easy. Love of the poor, love of country, love of the world. Those are hard loves. Those are brave loves. We’ve been taught to offer the harder love. We are trained to love bravely and well.

God bless you, sons and daughters of Loyola, God bless you now and for always. Class 2018, time now to go down from the hill, from the heights of Loyola. The Ateneo has enlarged your heart. Be brave. Time now to go and offer your love to the world.

*Jose Ramon T. Villarin, SJ*
President
Ateneo de Manila University
Atenistang totoo, ano nga ba ang ibig sabihin ng linyaang ito? Para sa atin, ang ibig sabihin nito ay isaang batang Atenistang buong puso at kusang loob na nagmamahal at namumuhay tulad ni Kristo.


Nandito tayo sa Ateneo hindi lamang para magkaroon ng karunungan sa maraming bagay, nandito rin tayo upang matutong magmahal sa kapwa lalo na sa Panginoon. Kung titingnan natin ang tunay na buhay ni Kristo, masasabing "parang Atenista" rin siya dahil siya ay matalino at mapagmahal sa lahat.

Isa sa mga paraan ng pamumuhay tulad ni Kristo ang pagtatrabaho sa pinakamabuti, pinakamahusay, at pinakaepektibong paraan para sa pinakamagandang bunga. At ang lahat ng ito ay para sa kaluwalhatian ng Panginoon. AMDG, ad majorem Dei gloriam.


Maraming salamat at mabuhay tayong lahat!
Today is a very memorable day for all of us present but above all for the young men of Ateneo Grade School Batch 2018. Today is a day of mixed feelings. There is a lot of sadness and nostalgia especially for most of you who have spent your entire grade school years in this beloved campus. You are already missing your classmates, classrooms, teachers, our ates and kuyas from the maintenance & security, and your favorite spot on campus. Today, you recall with fondness your favorite activities: the riots of class nights, the thrill of school fairs, the fun of intrams, and just the daily excitement of lining up for your favorite drink or snack at the canteen.

There is sadness and nostalgia but there is also great excitement and joy because in a just a few months you will step into the halls and classrooms of high school life where there will be new friends, new teachers, new ates & kuyas, new challenges, and new rules. High school is a whole new world where you can bring phones to school (but make sure they don’t make a sound!), where you can wear rubber shoes, and interact with girls from Grades 11 & 12 on a daily basis.

Today, you say goodbye to your old life at the Grade School but now you also officially say hello to your future life in High School. Today is a great ending to 6 years of grade school but it is also the beginning of 6 years of high school. Yes, there is sadness and nostalgia about leaving but I hope that these feelings are overshadowed by our hope and joy for the days ahead. This happy and warm feeling for the future that awaits us is the spirit of hope. It is this spirit that got you jumping out of your bed this morning with a bit more enthusiasm, this hope is what is making your hearts beat a bit faster right now, and it is this that is giving life to the many dreams in your minds. Graduation is a moment of great hope but today I want to ask you to try out this idea: we don’t need graduations to have this much hope and to feel this good deep inside. We can have this feeling and energy more often if we just give it a try.

What I’m about to share with you are things that I’ve learned in the past 14 years of caring and sharing through Gawad Kalinga. I want to share with you lessons and challenges of hope that I have picked up from the poor and the volunteers that I’ve met along the way.

I am a big fan of the power of hope because I have seen it overcome the destruction of typhoons and heal the wounds of war. This journey of hope started for me in 2004 in Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija where 4 consecutive typhoons practically flattened this small town (A). But the families of Gabaldon and the volunteers of GK refused to be defeated by these storms so they kept on building...
each day, week after week, month after month, year after year. Their hope transformed destruction into beauty, and their loss into victory.

Just recently, the siege of Marawi ended after 5 months of intense fighting leaving behind a once glorious city in utter ruin. But again in this war torn place, I’ve met people who simply refuse to give up and continue to keep on hoping for their beloved city.

This is Principal Maimona Macaunte, with the teachers of Abdulazis Elementary School (b), who went on teaching and serving the kids in their school even while the battle was on-going. Her students and their families did not evacuate because they were in a relatively safer side of Marawi so she and her teachers decided to stay with them.

Their hope and courage inspired us to build a central kitchen that now provides meals for 3,000 students who have already returned to Marawi. These people and events made me believe that as long as we have hope there is no storm, no war, and no challenge that can rob us of the joy of life.

So what did I learn about finding and keeping hope from
them? There are many but I want to share three things today.

First, I’ve learned that hope is a virus. It is an infection that is passed on from those who stay by our side during our most difficult moments. We pick up hope from those who never leave us behind. When I asked Principal Maimona why she stayed she simply pointed to the kids and their parents. When I asked the kids and parents why they stayed despite the dangers of the fighting, they simply pointed to Principal Maimona and the teachers. Our mere presence is hope, specially in the darkest of times. This is what Alfred was for Batman and Aunt May was for Spiderman….these superheroes were able to rise from their darkest challenges because they had someone by their side. I’d like you to seriously ask yourselves today: who stays by your side? Who was there when the days turned bad? Who was it who made you still get up in the morning even more determined to do better? From them you can get the virus of hope. Quickly scan your life and answer this: Who infects you with hope? But perhaps an even harder question but a more important one I also have to ask you: who do you infect with hope? Are you a source of hope? Do you infect others with hope?

The second lesson I’ve learned is that hope begins when we dream beyond and bigger than ourselves. We gain hope for ourselves the moment we learn to offer our lives for others. This is GK Tambulilid in Ormoc, Leyte. These are the men, women, and children of this village who sought shelter in that room during the height of Typhoon Yolanda. Unfortunately, the roof peeled off and the ceiling began to collapse on them in the middle of the night. The men took turns lifting the weight of the collapsed ceiling to protect their young and their women. When I asked their leader, Tito Buboy, what gave them the strength to go through that ordeal he said all the fathers thought of was the safety of their children and their wives.

But this power to do the unthinkable is not new to you. You have done the same for children in GK Sitio Ruby where you read stories and worked on math lessons. You never failed to teach in Sitio Ruby! You did the same in MLQ Elementary School where you cooked and prepared meals for hundreds of kids even if you did not even cook or prepare your meals at home. Strangely, we are able to do the difficult and achieve the impossible if we do it for others and not for ourselves. This is a lesson that T’Challa learned to embrace towards the end of the movie when he said “Wakanda will no longer watch from the shadows. We can not. We must not... We must find a way to look after one another, as if we were one single tribe.”
Opening up Wakanda was something his father and the past kings never did but T’Challa was able to do so because he decided that Wakanda and its riches is not meant just for them but also meant for others. I’d like you to again answer another question: what is the bigger and beyond that I live for? Dear parents, during their younger years you successfully awakened these young men to dream for themselves and your families. May I challenge you to enlarge the reach of their dreams as they as they begin to grow in years as high school students? The older they get the bigger their dreams should be. And the biggest and most exciting dreams are those that point us beyond ourselves and our families.

Finally, I’ve learned from them that hope is strongest when fused with faith and love. I would always find myself in disaster areas a few days or weeks after the storm clears where I get the chance to talk to people even before relief arrives or rehabilitation begins. This particular family in Marawi I had the chance to chat with several times in Saguiran where they evacuated. Each time, they would lament the lack of relief or the pain of war. And yet each time, they would always end our conversation with their plans for the future and sincerely utter “Inshallah!”—an expression in Islam that means “God Willing.” Amidst all the despair and destruction, they still find and point me back to God. These are Ate Feliza and Kuya Arnel Abas who are Yolanda survivors from Tanauan, Leyte. Like all other survivors, they lost almost everything they owned and many of those they love perished during the storm. And yet despite all that loss they stood up and started to rebuild not only their lives but the lives of hundreds of other people. In fact, they waited until others received their homes before they got one for themselves. When I ask them why they did all these they simply say that it is all they can really do to repay God for having kept them alive. These people are not only some of the most hopeful human beings I have met but also some of the most faithful and most loving. So, the final set of questions I want you to ask yourselves: how deep is my faith? How enduring is my love? Your answers to these questions will ultimately decide how big your hopes will be.

To my fellow parents: I invite you to be examples of love that endures and overcome, to be models of faith that is practiced and preached, and to be anchors of hope that never fades.

Today, dear graduates, as you take the next big step of your lives I encourage you to allow your hopes to rise above your sadness and fears. I encourage you to infect others with hope, to dream bigger and beyond your selves and families, and to always anchor yourselves in faith and in love. As you take this next big step of your lives, I invite you to look towards the greatest superhero of all time. He who walked on water, calmed the storm, turned water into wine, and raised people from the dead is our greatest model and source for hope, faith, and love. May your journey make you grow to be more like Christ each day!

Again, congratulations to all of you!
Standing here before you, I can’t help but be overwhelmed and humbled by the prospect of us finally graduating. While we’ve been looking forward to this event especially of late, it seems like today has come too soon. Looking back, the past four years was far from smooth sailing—from the spacious David Hall of Grade 7 we were catapulted to the cramped Bellarmine Hall with the most unusual schedule in Grade 8, then to an equally space-challenged JHS Annex (though the air conditioned rooms sure was a bonus). And in Grade 9, the clustering ushered in a new culture and tradition for the Junior High School. These were some of the major shifts that our batch had to deal with and overcome, on top of the tough academic demands, demonstrating our inner strength and resilience.

As we say our farewells, what thoughts would I like to share with you?

One, good things take time. This means that anything we wish to achieve in life, especially those that require excellence, takes hard work, grit, and time. I am one with many of you here, since I’m actually a late bloomer myself. Perhaps some of you think otherwise, but I’ve actually lost more math contests than I won especially during my earlier years. But if something is worth doing, then, we don’t give up. When we fall, we get back up. Medals and awards are the icing to the cake, but the knowledge and experience we gain, those stay with us—medal or no medal. What we went through these past few years suggests that we have it in us to prevail in the face of challenges. And as we face another unknown, prevail we shall.

Which brings me to my second point: Life is fluid. My being here doesn’t mean I’ll always stay on top. Hence, we cannot be complacent. We have to continually better ourselves. To believe that we are the best is the beginning of the end. It’s best to always try to be better—in our academic pursuits and especially in our spirituality. On the other hand, circumstances around us change as we’ve experienced, sometimes gradually, other times abruptly and without warning. Hence, we simply have to adapt and make the most of such changes. Because if we don’t change, we don’t grow.

Finally, let me close by thanking those who have enabled us in our Junior High School journey. Thank you Lord, especially for today and for Your continued blessings and guidance. Thank you to our administrators, teachers, and faculty. You have overseen our development during these past four years. Our educational experience is a culmination of the interactions we’ve had with you both in and out of the classroom. To our parents and families who continue to inspire and sustain us through the highs and lows of our journey, we are deeply grateful. To my fellow graduates, thank you for your friendship and the tons of memories. Let’s embrace the new opportunities we face and do great things in Senior High School! Once again, congratulations!
lam ko ang pakiramdam ng mga magulang ngayon dahil ang aking anak mismo ay magtatapos sa hapong ito. Shoutout to Kobe! Kaya naman dama ko ang saya—ang excitement—dala ng ipinagdiriwang natin. Allow me to speak for the parents here when I say, “We are all so very proud of you!”

’Yung anak ko ngang si Kobe, nung nalaman niyang niyaya ako para magsalita ngayong hapon, agad niya akong pingalan at tinanong: “Tatay, bakit ka nila pinili?”

Tama nga naman. ’Yun din po ang tanong ko. Ang totoo niya ‘yan hindi ako tanyag. Konti lang po ang may kilala sa akin. I am a celebrity only in my wife’s eyes.

Ngunit kung huhulaan ko kung bakit ako ang siyang nagsasalita dito, marahil ito ay dahil ako ay kayo rin. Ako ay guro, Atenista, at magulang—tulad ninyo.


Kaya ngayong hapon, gaganap ako bilang guro at—bago kayo tuluyang magpatalo sa Ateneo Junior High School—susubukan kong mag-iwas ng ilang paalam. Ngunit bilang magulang—sasadyain kong paigsisip an ang aking sabihin.

Dalawa lamang ang aking ipapaalala sa inyo mga anak:

KAYO AY MAG-AARAL. AT KAYO AY ATENISTA.
UNA, KAYO AY MAG-AARAL.

Sa araw na ito, ipinagdiriwang natin ang ikaapat at huli ninyong taon sa Ateneo Junior High School. Magandang alalahanin na napakarami niyo nang natutunan dito.

Kumbaga, parang mayroon kayong dalang backpack at—mula Grade 7 hanggang Grade 10—pinuno niyo ito ng mga naipong niyong karunungan at kakayahang. Ito ang backpack ng inyong kaalaman at ng inyong mga karanasan.


Ano pa ang inyong kasanayan? True or False! Sa subject na English, laging may bahagi ang pagsusulit na True or False. Minsan naman, Fact or Opinion.


Ngunit sa totoo lang, dahil dagsa ang impormasyon ngayon, madaling malito. Kung hindi ka mag-iingat, madaling maniwala sa maling impormasyon at tuluyang maligaw ng landas.


Dito rin sa Junior High School, lumabas kayo ng silid-aralan. Nasilip niyo ang malawak na mundong naghihintay sa inyo sa labas ng Ateneo.

Kaya'y nag-immersion. Sa pagpunta sa Bosoboso, Sapang Paly at Cabangan, Zambales, nasulyapan niyong ang pamumuhay ng ating mga kababayan. Sa mga pamilya ng marilang tanga- lungsod, mangingisda, sa piling ng mga manong at manang, natuto kayong makisama at makipag-kapwa.

Naranasan niyo rin maging bahagi ng iba't ibang mga org. Ang iba sa inyo'y sumali sa team bilang atleta. Ang ilan naman ay naging bahagi ng iba't ibang committee gaya ng Fair Com at Batch Com. Naturunan
niyong mamuno at maging bahagi ng isang grupo na may iisang pakay. Sama-sama kayong nagplane, sama-sama kayong nagpatupad, at sama-sama kayong napagod.


But wait, there’s more!


**NGAYON NAMAN ANG PANGALAWANG PAALAALA: KAYO AY ATENISTA.**


Pihado, naaalala niyo pa ang El Filibusterismo. Naaalala niyo pa ba si Padre Florentino? Sa may wakas ng El Fili, nakita nating hawak ni Padre Florentino ang kamay ni Simoun na sugatang pumunta sa kaniya. Sabi ng pari:

Nasaan ang kabataang mag-aalay ng kanilang kasibulanng buhay, ng kanilang adhikain at sigasig sa kabutihan ng Inang Bayan?
Nasaan ang siyang puspusang magbubuhos ng dugo upang hugasang lahat ng ating kahihiyan, ang ating mga kalapastangan, ang ating kabaluktutan?

O kabataan, kayo’y aming hinihintay!


Kabataan, kayo’y aming hinihintay.

Mga anak, ang paruloy niyong pag-aaral at pagpapabuti ng sarili ay paghahanda sa pagtugon sa tawag ng panahon.


Sa loob kasi ng Sibol, may imahe ng nakapakong Hesukristong nakasabit. Ngunit hindi ito nakaharap sa manunuod. Ito ay kita lamang sa entablado. Kaya naman habang kami ay kumakanta o gumanaap ng anu-anong papel, lahat iyon, alay kay Hesus. Binuhay noon sa amin ang pagtugon ng “Here I am, Lord!”


‘Last na. Alam niyo ring nagpapamalas sa atin ang Panginoon sa pamamagitan ng aking pamilya. Lalo na sa pamamagitan ng aking mga magulang. Dear sons, whatever happens in the future, reach out to us, your parents. Trust us. We may not know everything. But we will always be here for you. And everything we do, we do because we love you. We are here for you. Without condition.

‘At ngayon, sa wakas, sa ating pagpapalam sa amin sa bawat isa sa aking kaalaman, sa aking kakayahang aking kapatid sa aking kapatid kayo, lalo na sa aking kaalaman at kakayahang aking kapatid sa aking kaalaman。“Heto ako, ang kabataang Filipino, kabataang Atenista, handang tumugon sa tawag ng Panginoon at hamon ng panahon.
Batch 2018, we are all here today to celebrate completion. We’re all here to say goodbye to the Ateneo de Manila Senior High School, which we, as the pioneering batch, have come to shape and form every single day for the past two years. I think in order to give a proper farewell to the ASHS, we must first try to find what our journeys here meant.

We, as the first batch, had the unique opportunity of being the foundation of building the culture and collective memory that will continue to define the ASHS. We all had different backstories coming into it. For myself, I had already been put in the Ateneo ten years prior, something I thank my parents for. And the prologue to my ASHS story ended with two wonderful years with the A boys. I was very hesitant then to enter a system that no one really knew anything about. Many of the people here may have had similar feelings. For others, the hesitation may have come from having to transfer here from various parts of the country.

Rather abruptly, this hodgepodge of individuals was thrown together into a newly constructed building, that was as of then, devoid of meaning. I think we can be proud to say that we were the first batch to fill the rooms and halls with our stories. These stories are now becoming all but memories. And perhaps, this is why the goodbye is difficult. Now what do these memories contain?

They contain the hardships faced by about 850 guinea pigs, young men and women who had to test a newly constructed academic system. We all trudged through the four research papers in a semester. Our initially hopeful faces were quickly replaced with tired expressions highlighted by eyebags. I personally would not have made it through any of this without three things. Firstly, Starbucks. Secondly, to the yayas watching at home who prepare my morning coffee. And thirdly, to Sir Dan Si who let me sleep in Statistics class. But more importantly, the academic hardships also served as the impetus for us to form the bonds with one another that would build a sense of family in the end. We ended up friends with our research group mates, the people who told you the homework at 10 pm, the people who were cramming at 2 am, the people who laughed at you for failing a Calculus Long Test because you watched Star Wars instead of studying. I’m sorry Sir Gerome. It was this initial push of academics that brought my own 11-Regis, and now 12-Walpole, under the glorious guidance of Mr. Pineda together. It was this hardship of academics which we all had to face here in the ASHS.

But we didn’t allow our journeys to be defined by academics alone. We started a very admirable culture of participation. We have a plethora of top-performing orgs and varsities. I mean for my very own debate team, the Best Speaker of the Philippines is our debate captain Mikko Vitug. We have a very active and dedicated Sanggu, whose natural habitat is the air-conditioned confines of the OSA Hub: a room that has
quite possibly seen more tears and anxiety attacks than anywhere else on this campus. We also seemed like we always had a District Week, Animal Welfare Week, Strand Week, or some other excuse people came up with to fill the foyer with exhibits and activities.

However, I cannot possibly cover all your personal stories here. It is often the walks with friends home, the impromptu interactions with teachers, or Ate Guard telling us, “Pal, labas na, pal!” that made our journeys here colorful.

What I hope you all do now is to remember the moments you had here that mattered. Remember the stories that gave these past two years meaning for each one of you. Recognize now that these moments are all memories now. Recognize that we’re all leaving, and that the walls of that building will never again lay witness to new stories from our batch. However, recognize also that our batch’s collective memory will stay alive and influence our juniors, and the succeeding batches. The fact is, Batch 2018, we were the first ones to define what it meant to be an ASHS ABM, GA, HumSS, or STEM student. We were the first ones to breathe life into that building. And having served as the foundation, the ghosts of our memories will remain roaming there for as long as there is an ASHS.

However, we can take solace in this goodbye through what we carry with us as we walk on a little past the Gesu, to the other side of Katipunan, to the far reaches of Taft or Espana, or even across actual oceans, or wherever you want to go to college. We take with us, as pioneers, the ability to adapt and stay strong. We take with us the zeal to stand up for what is right, like we did against Marcos’ burial or EJKs. Ultimately, we take with us the memories and life that that building has in turn granted us.

We set the example, Batch 2018, and if I might say so myself, an ASHS that started with us is one whose future I am confident about. I am proud to be a part of this family, this Atenean batch.

“O kay tagal din kitang minahal. O kay tagal din kitang mamahalin.” Maraming salamat. May the Force be with us all.
Let me tell you the stories of three remarkable individuals. I assure you these are true stories, and not fake news. This story is set in the 1940s before the onset of World War II. Three boys lived peacefully without knowing the existence of the other.

Boy Luzon was born to a life of privilege in Manila. His parents were known intellectuals and intelligent discourse and discussions often dominated the dinner table, for this was a family that thrived on knowledge and a deep appreciation of their country’s history and culture. In his teens, Boy Luzon himself went to the Ateneo de Manila high school in Padre Faura.

Boy Visayas grew up in a small town in Bohol, a province steeped in colonial history. Its numerous old and ornate churches and cathedrals are a testament to the craftsmanship of its artisans and carpenters. A skill much admired by the young boy. Boy Visayas’ parents were minor political figures in their town and were much respected community leaders. Through his parents, he grew up with an ardent love for his country.

Boy Mindanao was a very young boy of around six years old who grew up in the poverty-laden island of Siasi, part of the culturally rich province of Sulu. His parents were seasonal fishermen and farmers. They were poor but he grew up in a land of bounty and he spent his days watching the colourful fishes in the sea and the vivid feathers of the migratory birds that pass through the island. Here, he learned to make vintas and to appreciate his unique Moro culture.

On December 1941, war broke out in the Philippines and the lives of our three boys changed forever.

Boy Luzon and his siblings joined the resistance against the Japanese. They left their studies at the Ateneo and took to the mountains to fight as guerrillas. Boy Luzon’s older brother, Liling, was captured by the Japanese forces and was beheaded and buried in a mass grave. Boy Luzon would spend much of his life looking for Liling whose body was never found.

Boy Visayas, on the other hand, witnessed the Japanese’s occupation of their hometown. His family was rounded up by the Japanese. The Japanese wanted to use them to get the support of the townspeople. But rather than collaborating with them, his parents chose to stand up against the occupying forces. They were incarcerated and tortured. Boy Visayas himself was tortured to force his parents to side with the Japanese, but until the end, his parents stayed true patriots and they were publicly executed by beheading.

Boy Mindanao’s idyllic town was garrisoned by the Japanese and the 5-year-old was confused why his family was always on the run and in hiding. His uncles had founded and organized the first openly defiant Muslim guerrilla unit in Sulu, and after several victories against the Japanese, they were wanted men. When caught, one of Boy Mindanao’s uncles was beheaded along with his very pregnant wife.
Horror has come to these young boys lives, and it was as painful as it was terrible.

But despite the personal tragedies that befell their families, and first handedly witnessing and experiencing the cruelty and ugliness of war, these boys would eventually grow up to be remarkable men. Call it fate or destiny, but despite the geographical distance and economic disparities, the three boys would eventually meet and become great friends and colleagues.

Boy Luzon became a writer, a secretary of Education, and activist and an opposition icon who challenged the Marcos Dictatorship under Martial Law. He could have chosen to focus on the horrors of war but he chose to write about the beauty of the Philippines. He is an essential articulator of our culture through his research and publication on Philippine Fiestas. In 2003, Boy Luzon, Dr. Alejandro R. Roces was named National Artist for Literature.

Boy Visayas studied fine arts art, became an educator, founder of several art organizations, and mentor to many young artists. He chose to showcase Philippine culture through his artworks. He is recognized as the father of modern sculpture in the country and at the age of 46 was declared as the youngest National Artist for Sculpture: Napoleon Abueva who passed away last month is Boy Visayas.

Then there is Boy Mindanao who eventually saved enough money to buy a one way ticket to Manila to pursue his dream of becoming an artist. It wasn’t easy for him as he was poor and being a Tausug, was often discriminated against. But he, too, like Napoleon Abueva studied in the US under a scholarship, and came home to the Philippines to teach. He shared the vivid colors of his Moro culture through the sarimanok and ukkil. In 2006, Boy Mindanao, my own father, Abdulmari Asia Imao, was honoured as the first Muslim Filipino National Artist for the Visual Arts.

We all have stories to tell. Some of you may be products of public schools and are here at the Ateneo on scholarship. Still some of you may have been at the Ateneo since you were in short pants, and have grown comfortable in the confines of the school. I do not know your personal stories, but I am sure that every joy, every challenge, every success have brought you to this place in time. I hope that as you journey through life, you will be able to take on any difficulty you encounter without losing your optimism and lust for life.

Take inspiration from our three boys. The worst that could happen happened to them and yet they grew up to be exceptional men. They did not let the tragedies that happened in their young lives to overwhelm them. Instead they chose to focus on the positive and became articulators of Philippine history, literature, art and culture. They struggled and they survived and became the best in their fields. Through their writings and their art, they imaged the best of the Filipino and showcased the best of the Philippines.
Two years ago at the same time that the Ateneo de Manila opened its doors to female students in what was traditionally an all-male high school system, we ushered in a new government, and with it a new war. A war on the evils of drugs. Unfortunately, like any other war, the war on drugs can have innocents as collateral damage.

Sadly, there were 18-year-olds like Boy Luzon who were victims of this war. Some never even reached 18, they were snatched from their homes, falsely accused and gunned down as they pled for their life. This was August last year.

Just early this month, a 13-year-old much like Boy Visayas, is at one moment quietly hanging out with his playmates, ironically on a wall near a slaughter house, he was randomly shot. Before he died at the arms of his parents, he said he was shot by a ‘masked man’ wearing police pants.

In August 2016, a five-year-old girl, much like the age of Boy Mindanao when WWII came, got shot and killed by motorcycle riding masked men who were targeting her grandfather.

They were robbed of their futures and their lives. Were never even given the chance to rise up against poverty. They could have been our educators, artists, scholars, rising up despite the challenges that faced them but they were never given the chance to be.

I have a special message for the first batch of graduating ladies, which includes my daughter, Sarah. These are challenging times to be a woman, and I don’t mean just passing Mathematics or Filipino.

A senator, an ombudsman, a chief justice, a vice president. All beleaguered by misogyny, their characters attacked by fabrications and yet these principled women have stood their ground despite the many challenges hurled their way and the lies that were spun to discredit them. They continue to do their jobs, and stand by the ideals and principles of our Constitution. In these challenging times, these are women we can admire and look up to, and hope our girls grow up to be: strong, dedicated and principled. These women are relevant and essential, and we should stand by them.

At every graduation, when we are ready to take the next step, it would be prudent to remember that as you will be awarded with your hard work via your diploma—take this opportunity to remember and honor the mentors who challenged you, especially those who gave you a hard time but in effect have tempered you like a katana blade, forging, pounding and folding your determination into a multi-layer hardened intellectual alloy.

St. Ignatius de Loyola once wielded a sword, he fought his enemies as a warrior, later in life he embraced the life of a faithful servant of God, founded the Jesuit order, but he still wielded a metaphorical sword that was built on words from the Scriptures, tempered by the flames of his deep love for humanity and sharpened by the life of sacrifice he gave to the church shared by the spirit and passion of his Jesuit brethren.
My sword is my art, and I chose to use it to image an alternative image of history, to image truths embodied in the visual metaphors and narratives of my sculptures and paintings. I have used it to champion my advocacies for human rights and dignity.

You might not realize it, but you already have a sword in your pockets, your mobile phones, your connection to the world at large are like your own powerful lightsabers.

But it is a double-edged sword. In the wrong hands it can transform into a weapon of a Sith Lord and used to strike down the truth, and infect our wounded nation with lies. It can be used by forces allied with the dark side of the force where “fear” is their strategy of submission.

The internet and Facebook will feed you many stories. You have to discern what is true and what is false. It is your generation’s bane or blessing.

You can choose to wield your “metaphorical swords” in whatever form it takes, as long it is tempered by the truth and forged with the pursuit of justice. But if you find yourself in that situation where you have no recourse but to draw that sword and use it to strike down your enemies, do so guided with your love for humanity and your faith in God.

Or you may opt to use it as a weapon of choice by the Jedi Knights, a light saber as a source of illumination, a beacon to rally the resistance fighters against the empire corrupted by the dark side.

We must keep our faith in the Republic. The day we stop believing democracy can work is the day we lose it.

—quoted from Naboo Queen Jamillia of the Star Wars prequels.

I am a geek at heart, and I find in quotes from the Star Wars trilogies a wealth of wisdom especially in reference to what is happening around the world. To quote the Force Being, Bendu, in the recently concluded Star Wars “Rebels” series:

An object cannot make you good or evil. The temptation of power, forbidden knowledge, even the desire to do good can lead some down that path. But only you can change yourself.

One of the lesser known Star Wars characters—Riyo Chuchi (her plight mirrors the struggles of Padme Amidala, the mother of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia Organa) said, and it has become my mantra in my advocacies:

To die for one’s people is a great sacrifice. To live for one’s people, an even greater sacrifice. I choose to live for my people.

I want to conclude my talk with this promise. It is based on an earlier piece I wrote one evening when it struck me that children were being murdered on the streets and in their homes, that they are being sacrificed as collateral damage for a senseless war... I feared for my own children,
their classmates, our children. And I decided it was time to take out my metaphorical sword. It was time to defend the truth and seek justice.

As an artist, I believe that majority of Filipinos are blessed with a creative soul, they are the best singers, dancers, storytellers and visual artists in their own right. The best craftsmen and artisans in whatever hobby or job they do.

You have to be creative with your protests.

You have to communicate with the language of your generation.

You must see beyond the ugliness and darkness and drown these manifestations with the strengths of your nation.

So in place of a phone, I shall draw out my lightsaber—and look: it’s blue. :)

We, enlightened Filipinos—creative bearers of light and illumination peaceful creatures of our studios, study table and desks we prefer to quietly toil on our work for this nation we love so dearly. –but once you disturb the peace of our environment –the source of our nourishment –threaten the lives of our loved ones –the source of our inspiration we will move and make the streets as our canvas we will sing songs from the mouth of the voiceless and dance with the rage and passion of resistance we will scratch words of truth and defiance onto the walls that divide our nation.

Once we are angered, pained, and wounded... –we will bleed masterpieces more powerful than the monuments of tyrants. ...and we will not stop!

Until we have painted our final stroke of dissent

Hummed our last note of solidarity

Choreographed our climactic movement with the people

And have penned the last line of our ode of deliverance and justice.

Mabuhay ang 2018 batch ng K-12 Senior High ng Ateneo de Manila University! Maraming Salamat po.

May the Force be with you—ALWAYS !!!
Loyola Schools

MINORS GRADUATIONS
BACCALAUREATE MASS
Thank you to the Loyola Schools—School of Humanities for inviting me here today. I always consider coming home to the Ateneo as an opportunity to re-energize myself. It gives me a chance to slow down and remember the things I believed I could do back when I was a student. It is quite easy to forget these things once I am caught in the whirlwind of completing one task after another.

Today is the culmination of your minor studies under the School of Humanities. It would be the perfect time to ask yourselves why you chose to “add on” required subjects to your already challenging Ateneo education. Why did you decide to complete a minor in Literature-English, Literature-Filipino, Music Literature, Philosophy, French, German, Spanish, Creative Writing or Theater Arts?

You form a small percentage of this year’s graduating class. It would be safe to say that you chose to learn more than what you were originally required to learn. Whatever your reason may be for being bold enough to “add on” subjects to your already demanding college life, I hope that you would be able to share it with your parents and friends so that you will not forget why you made this decision. More than being a celebration, let this afternoon be an opportunity to achieve some clarity on what you wish to pursue after graduation by articulating why you chose to complete your minor program.

Allow me to pause for a while to give each of you an opportunity to answer the question, “Why did you choose to sign up for the minor degree that you now completed?”

As for me, I chose Philosophy and Development Management as my tracks for my Interdisciplinary Studies Degree. My classes exposed me to various frameworks that allowed me to understand “why things are the way they are.” It gave me the knowledge and tools to unpack situations in terms of its causes and effects. But more than that, it gave me the ability to discern if such situation should continue to exist or if it should be changed. My desire to empower people, especially the poor, to pursue the life that they wish to live, has always been the galvanizing force of my refusal to accept things as they are. It has energized me to challenge structures and introduce innovations that will enable the poor to overcome their challenges and realize their full human potential.

It was eight years ago when I began working as a public servant at the Department of Social Welfare and Development. It was not a very popular decision amongst my peers back then because of the various stereotypes that we have about government workers. But it was clear to me that government offers the potential for scale much more than any...
non-government organization so I took on the challenge of creating changes from within the bureaucracy. As the youngest Director of the DSWD at 25 years old, I found myself heading a team that is mostly composed of individuals who have been in the Department for more than 10 years, many of them as old or even older than my parents. I brought with me the things I learned about people empowerment and self-reliance from the Ateneo and went on a mission to transition a thirty-year old welfare-oriented livelihood program to a market-oriented grassroots community enterprise program. Aside from that, I was also very vocal about changing the culture of “utang na loob” among the families that we were supporting. I sent out reminders to ensure that the people will not be burdened to prepare food and tokens for us when we do our fieldwork.

I still remember the time when I travelled to Bindoy, Negros Oriental together with some of my DSWD colleagues to conduct spot checks on our livelihood projects. I was looking forward to our heartwarming conversations with the mothers from the community. As soon as I entered the Day Care Center that served as our venue for that day, I immediately raised my voice and told my staff, “Hindi ba sinabi ko na dapat walaang pakain tuwing bibisita tayo? Hindi dapat mag-abala ang mga tao, nandito tayo para tumulong, hindi para makaabala.” Then I heard someone from behind me say, “Ma’am, hindi naman po kayo nakakaabala. Hayaan niyo po kaming pasalamatan kayo para sa lahat ng tulong niyo. Galing po ito sa pinaghiranahan namin at kami po talagang mag may gusto nito, huwag niyo po sa sila pagtalunan.” Immediately, I felt ashamed of myself. I felt ashamed because I failed to honor their freedom to decide how they wish to welcome our group to their community. We were the visitors, and yet I thought of imposing on them. In fact, I thought of removing their ability to be “the giver” by limiting them as mere recipients of our livelihood assistance.

Though I felt uncomfortable, I continued to engage them to hear their stories of perseverance as they work hard to earn enough for their daily needs. Their entrepreneurial instincts were natural to them, and their determination to succeed was admirable. Nanay Linda was not done teaching me a lesson that day when she ran after me as I headed towards our van while she was holding a silver foil on her right hand. She handed it to me and said, “Ma’am, pakibigay po sa mga magulang mo ito. Salamat po sa kamila kasi may mga katulad mong nagigisi na amin.”

Nanay Linda taught me about human dignity, abundance and gratitude that day. My encounter with her pushed me to open myself up to be helped and to allow myself to be changed if it is my goal to create ripples of change in society. Ultimately, it was a call to humility—to admit my own mistakes and limitations, and therefore to learn how to receive if I am to truly give.

These were the most important lessons that carried me through as I accepted the daunting task of being Vice President Leni Robredo’s
Spokesperson. To say that being offered this post was unexpected is an understatement as I was not even involved in the Communications Team of her campaign. My immediate response was, “I cannot be a spokesperson because I am not a lawyer.” I was immediately assured by our bosses that I did not need to be a lawyer to do the job, and that a team of experts will brief me about the details of the automated election system and the current status of the canvassing of votes. When I asked what was required of me, I was told to just be myself.

Overwhelmed with how things unfolded so quickly, I found myself in a room with a make-up artist preparing me for my very first Press Conference and two intimidating lawyers who were training me to answer questions that might be asked by the media. At that point, I knew I did not know everything that I needed to know. It was a 2-hour crash course on election law and public relations combined. I was told to truthfully respond to the questions, and admit that I currently do not have an answer to a question that I am not prepared to answer.

When I entered the press briefing room full of news personalities whom I have only seen on TV, and huge cameras with bright, blinding lights, I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and imagined myself in very familiar communities that I have immersed myself in throughout my career as a development worker. I saw their faces and heard their questions about what was going on in the elections.

Was I equipped to take on that job? Perhaps. Suddenly, the unfamiliar arena of media and public relations became very much similar to the need to connect with people from different walks of life and show empathy to people who are worried about the things happening in our country. Was I fully equipped? Definitely not, and that gives space to allow other people to fill in the gaps of what I could not cover.

As the days of serving as the Vice President’s Spokesperson turned into weeks, and then into months, I found myself in the midst of vicious attacks and fake news hurled against the Vice President. I even received a few attacks directed towards me. It became a challenge to get our message out amidst the growing political noise especially in social media. Each time we would call out the abuses of the current Administration, our statements would simply be branded as “dilawan” or Anti-Duterte. The moment reality is reduced to a simplistic view of “if you are not with us, then you are against us” is when we enter a dangerous trap where seeds of conflict grow.

Last year, we witnessed how conflict displaced families from an entire city when the Marawi Siege happened. Months before the Siege, our Office had partnered with the City Government of Marawi to implement anti-poverty programs in the farthest and poorest barangays in their community through our Angat Buhay program. We visited Barangay Dayawan where I met a young and energetic woman named Mocrimah. She passionately talked about the need to revive their dying culture of weaving beautiful landap cloths. We had plans of providing them with more looms and renovating their weaving center but that was all put on hold due to the Marawi Siege. Two days after the war broke, Mocrimah texted me to seek for help not just for her family but for the rest of their community. I visited them in a cramped apartment in Iligan City where I listened to their stories of running away from their homes with nothing but the clothes that they were wearing. We provided
the material things that they needed, but we could not respond to their fear, uncertainty and anger.

It really seems that this episode in our history has brought out the worst in us. Last Friday, I joined the Indignation Rally held by students at Gate 2.5 to stand up against the decision of the Supreme Court to unconstitutionally remove its Chief Justice. As I stood there, I remembered being in the same place more than 10 years ago when I joined rallies to fight against corruption during the Presidency of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. To some people, it may seem like our country is forever trapped in a vicious cycle, but the Humanities has taught us that there is always something new to be gained in every experience, which could possibly allow us to break away from this cycle. Standing upon this truth brings us away from despair and moves us towards hope. The School of Humanities has also cautioned us about the danger of speaking in absolutes like “nothing has changed” or “it will always be this way.”

Our education has given us an invitation to always see things from different perspectives and discern within gray areas.

Amidst our challenging times today, literature, music, Philosophy, languages, creative writing and theater arts are bridges towards a deeper understanding of who we are as a nation, and who we can be if we stand together, united, as a people. The lens given to us by the Humanities allows us to see things from a space of empathy and tolerance that enables complementation instead of competition. Being given this privilege to receive a minor degree from the Ateneo’s School of Humanities comes with a responsibility to bring light to the darkness that surrounds us. I challenge you to use your talents to help our country rise up and look fear, indifference, and apathy straight in the eye and say, “Never Again.”

Ang mga nangyayari sa ating bansa ngayon ay hindi na usapin ng politika lamang. Tungkol na ito sa pagpapakatao at paksikapakapwa-tao. Hindi ninyo kailangang magtrabaho sa pamahalaan o kaya sa isang NGO para makatulong sa kapwa-tao.

Our education has taught us about the value of integrity and the risks that one might face if it is lost. It pushes us to consistently speak our truth and correct our wrongs even if it may seem unpopular. There may be times when remaining silent appears to be a practical choice, but if it is not the right choice, it is our integrity that will rob us of our ability to sleep at night until we right the wrong.

I began by asking you why you sought to gain more from your Ateneo education by completing a minor program from the School of Humanities. As you slowly embrace your why, you will realize that it is not about you but it is about your mission. Our Humanities education frees us to be the person we desire to become. Our Humanities education enables us to be the person that other people need us to be.

Graduating from the Ateneo gives you clarity about your values system that makes you who you are. Life experiences in the so-called “real world” will chip away at you and challenge the very core of your values. But at the end of the day, you must trust that the Ateneo has given you enough skills to make sense of your life and not lose yourself in the process. Tiwing pinagdadaanan ninyo ang hirap na panindigan ang inyong mga pinahahalagahan dahil sa gulo ng mundo sa labas, alalahanin mayroon kayong maawitan dito sa Ateneo.

Thank you very much and Vivon Las Humanidades!
It’s good to be back here. It’s been 10 years since I received my Minor in Chinese Studies; 10 years since I last spoke Chinese. I’m just kidding. I tried it in HK when I ordered food, but apparently, they spoke Cantonese, and not everybody understood Mandarin. But nevertheless, it was a fun experience, this Minor in Chinese Studies. I really learned a lot. It helped me somewhat in some of the businesses that I’m engaged in.

This is actually the first time I’m giving a commencement speech here in Ateneo, my alma mater. I’ve been invited by other universities, so I’m excited and I’m looking forward to talking to you, guys.

Congratulations, once again, to all of you. Whether you decided to pursue this minor because of your passion for the subject matter, or simply to add more color to your resume, I think it’s definitely a cause for celebration. To the parents also who worked so hard to make this day a reality, congratulations.

I will not pretend to be an expert in this field of social sciences like Denise who spoke beautifully and very profoundly. Today, allow me to share my story, because it’s been a while, its been 10 years since I graduated. I don’t think you guys watch the PBA or watch GMA 7. Because of the developments nowadays, you probably watch on YouTube. Let me share with you my story.

The first thing I’d like to talk about is trusting in God’s divine plan. I come from a Chinese Filipino family. My great grandparents migrated to the Philippines from China. My grandfather started selling newspapers and cigarettes in the streets of Manila to pay for his own schooling. He eventually opened his own hardware store and factory. My father and his siblings were extremely hard working for the business, and even during their summer breaks, when they were still in school, they were also working. I was fortunate enough to have received quality education in a Chinese school called Xavier in Greenhills. Like in most traditional Chinese families, the culture was for the parents to push their kids to get the best grades by all means in elementary and in high school, and then study in a reputable college, and then eventually come work in the family business. Now, during those days, my parents were no different. When I was in grade school, my coach in the school team saw me playing basketball with my classmates during recess. So he asked me if I wanted to try out for the school team. I asked permission from my mom, but she said no. Fortunately, my coach was very persistent. What he did, he personally called our house to ask her, to try and to see what would happen. No promises. So my mom, after consulting with my dad, sabi nya, “Sige, try out ka lang, and let’s see what happens.” So I did, and I made it to the team.

The first tournament that I played in was a Milo sponsored tournament. Not many of you know that I was a benchwarmer, meaning the type of player who warmed the bench for the Superstar. One time, we got to the finals in the Philippines. In that game, I was the 10th man of the team. Being the 10th player meant there would...
be 4 subs first before I could go and play. I was one of the last options. To everyone’s surprise, we made it to the championship match. No Philippine team had ever made it or had ever won the tournament, because we were competing against bigger and more skilled athletic Americans.

The night before the championship, we were in the room resting, when suddenly, a bunch of older boys from the older team barged into our room and introduced us to this pay-per-view box on top of the TV. Since we were in Las Vegas, the City of Sin, I’m sure you can guess what the show was—it was an x-rated film. Mind you, we were in grade school. Being the goody-goody boy that I was, I remembered my mom telling me before we left for the States that I shouldn’t watch indecent shows. So what I did, believe it or not, I got the rosary that she gave me, and I left the room. Of course, I was laughed at and ridiculed. I left the room and prayed the rosary.

The next day was championship time; it was time to make history. Unfortunately, we were losing to the American team. In the second half, one of our star players suffered from cramps; another one sprained his ankle, injured his foot and couldn’t play; and about 3 other players were in foul trouble. Of all the days for this to happen, it had to be on the day that we were supposed to make history. We were in deep trouble. My coach looked at the bench and I guess parang I didn’t have a choice, Chris pasok. I ran to the technical table. To everyone’s surprise, I played the best game of my life; turned the game around to give us the championship. So we made history that day and guess who was made MVP of the tournament?

Why am I sharing this? I guess I wanted to say that this miracle that happened to me, from zero to hero. Who knows? It may have been pure coincidence, but I’d like to think that it was God’s divine hand, of course with Mama Mary’s intercession, that made this miracle possible. That experience turned everything around for me. In the succeeding years, my confidence and my coaches’ confidence skyrocketed. I became one of the main guys, and we had many more victories for Xavier School. Because of that, I was eventually recruited by this university, and was offered an athletic scholarship and played five years in the UAAP. And then, later on, I was also invited to be part of the national team called GILAS PILIPINAS where I played 4 years, and later, professional basketball, where I’m now on my sixth year as a member of the Rain or Shine Elasto Painters. So basketball has opened so many doors for me, like hosting TV programs, signing endorsement contracts, meeting all sorts of individuals, and even getting involved with social projects. Where I am now is really a diversion from the path my parents planned out for me. Like I said, we were expected to be in the family business, or at least work in a corporate and an office job. Looking back, if my coach had not made that one phone call to my mom when I was in grade school, I may never have played competitive basketball. If I had not run away from the room with a rosary in Las Vegas, maybe I wouldn’t have had that miraculous game. If I had not gone on an exchange program in Lille, France for junior term abroad when I was here in Ateneo, where I sat out one year in UAAP, I would not have had a fifth and last playing year in 2008, and then I would never have won a UAAP championship. The championship that changed my life. Moreover, I probably would not have been invited to play in the national team, because all of those things happened in 2008, in my senior year, and maybe I wouldn’t have been standing here. It was all about opportunity and timing.

So don’t worry. Like many of you, in every phase of my life, I was uncertain as to where I would end up in a few years. In fact, until now,
I still am. I don’t know if you know, but I was very close to joining De La Salle after high school because I was also being aggressively recruited by the school. Imagine what would have happened to me.

Back then, it was almost impossible to connect all of these seemingly meaningless decisions or events. But now, as I look back to 20 years, it’s all very clear. You could only connect the dots and see the bigger picture, looking back. Sometimes I’m amazed at how everything fell into place. And I wonder, is this coincidence, or is it destiny? I will always remember what a priest friend of mine told me, “You know Chris, there are no accidents in God’s plan.” Truly, there are no accidents in God’s plan. Sometimes, we have to let go and to trust in Him.

One quote that has helped me deal with the uncertainties of life comes from an Indian movie, 3 Idiots. It’s a really insightful movie. One character said, and I quote, “Don’t chase after success but focus on excellence, and success will find you.” Sometimes we’re overly inspired by stories of people like Mark Zuckerberg or tech geniuses who became billionaires overnight, and we aspire to be like that. My advice to you is to just be patient. Just focus on being excellent, or here in Ateneo we say, living out the spirit of the Magis. But that UAAP championship in 2008 was not purely luck. It was not an overnight success, but it was the fruit of a long process of painful losses, and perhaps a decade or more of sacrifices in developing good habits.

Focus on excellence, develop good habits, forge meaningful relationships, and take care of your reputation. Warren Buffet said it takes a lifetime to build your reputation but just minutes to ruin it.

Next thing I’d like to talk about is about love and adversity. When I was playing basketball in UAAP, I went through another trying period year. In my rookie year, I was struggling to balance my academics and my sports. I was hardly being used, and I really wanted to quit. There was one game that I will never forget in my sophomore year, and it was a game against La Salle. Those days, when there was an Ateneo-La Salle game, everything and everyone would stop and watch. It was a national event. You go into the coliseum; it was filled to the rafters. As a player when you go into the court, you get goosebumps. For a player, that is what you look forward to, you want to play in an Ateneo-La Salle game. And there’s a saying, matalo na sa iba, wag lang sa La Salle. That is how competitive we were. In that game, we were losing double digits in the second half. Ganun pa din medyo bangko pa din ako. So tambak na, sabi ni coach, no choice, sige na nga, pumasok ka na. Again, we were making a run, humabol kami, from double digits 5 points na lang. And then I got a steal, wide open, fast break lay-up to cut the lead down to 3. Cut to the excitement of the coliseum. And then to the dismay of the Ateneo fans, I missed the lay-up really badly. It didn’t even go above the rim. I felt the energy of the coliseum being zapped out. We lost the momentum and we lost the game. It was so embarrassing. And I think that was the most embarrassing moment of my career. It’s like missing a penalty kick in football pero walang goalie.

It had to happen against our archrival, on national TV pa, so I could not walk with my head up in school for months. I could hear people talking about me, whispering, calling me a choker. I was scared and I had low self-esteem. I never recovered that season and I was the lowest of lows. I wanted to quit so badly. What I did, I took a year off from basketball, went to France to do an exchange program, and there I was able to reflect. One thing I realized was that I still loved basketball. I still loved the game. I loved to compete. So the following year, I went back to the team, and I worked harder than ever. I didn’t see it then, but I realized that going through that humiliating moment was the best thing
That happened to me. And what would happen next was impossible had I not been tested by fire. From being at my lowest, I had nowhere to go but up. I wasn’t afraid anymore. How much worse could it get than missing a wide open lay-up.

I gained the courage later on to take game-winning shots. From being named a choker, they gave me a new moniker, they called me Cardiac Kid, meaning somebody who makes big plays during pressure situations. Now later on, I was appointed team captain, and then my contribution to the team became more significant as well. So in my senior year, 2008, we finally won the championship for the community after 6 years, and ironically it was against our biggest rival—La Salle. Talk about sweet revenge.

More than in the classroom, I believe that it is during such adverse periods that the best life lessons are taught. We gain experience, we build character. We learn to be resilient, and in my case I learned to be courageous. It also helps to have mentors to guide us.

If you’re passionate about something, go for it. Nothing is more fulfilling than fulfilling something you’re crazy about, but challenges are part of life. It is part of the process. We have to learn to embrace them, to deal with them head on. Life will throw out curveballs but it is those people who are able to handle them with grace who can hit the home runs.

Just to finish, there is no doubt that this whole digital revolution has changed the way we live, from the way we communicate, to the way we seek information, travel, eat or entertain ourselves. This is the period that we live in right now, the advantages are astonishing, but the consequences are also threatening. For one, we are developing a culture of instant gratification, becoming less patient and less persevering. Social media sites are powerful but are also threatening our measures of self-worth. They promote a culture of narcissism and vanity. Let’s remember that despite these changes, what must remain constant is our value system. We can ride with the revolution, but we must hold on to the values taught to us by this very own institution. The timeless values of excellence, *magis*, honesty, patience, sincerity, humility, respect, modesty, perseverance, compassion and so on.

I’d like to highlight one value, which is service; most especially in this modern world, where it’s all about me, me, and me. Only by being selfless and by being of service to others can we truly be happy and contribute to nation building. We are men and women for others. What makes me truly proud to be an Atenean is when I hear of individuals, businessmen, politicians, artists, who are alumni of Ateneo, who act selflessly, and who serve the community and the country with all sincerity. That makes me proud to be an Atenean. Our society needs role models. They are hard to find in Hollywood, or our local showbiz scene, or even among those who call themselves public servants. The most powerful influencers are not those who have thousands of followers, but rather, ordinary people whom we interact with everyday who live extraordinary lives. Believe me, your good example is impacting more people more than you’ll ever know. And this is what gives me hope for a better society.

Now as you go outside of this campus, make these values a habit. You can’t go wrong. Serve others and you’ll be happier. Now, in pursuing your career, follow your heart, and don’t easily give up. And lastly, have the courage to move forward. You may not connect the dots now, but remember it will all come together in the end, that there are no accidents in God’s plans. Good luck to all of you, God bless you all! One Big Fight!
Sa Pakpak ng Agila

BISHOP AMBO DAVID NG KALOOKAN

Nakita ninyo kung... paano ko kayo inilipad sa mga pakpak ng agila at dinala rito sa akin...

—EKSOĐO 19:4


Ang ganda pala ng talimlihag ng agila sa Bibliya. Bakit ba hindi ko agad naiugnay ang biblikal na larawan na ito sa blue eagle ng noong istudyante pa ako dito sa Ateneo? Noong nag-aaral pa ako sa masarap na pugad ng Ateneo at kumukuha ng kursong Pre-Divinity, nahumaling din ako sa mga tshirt, baseball caps, ballers, coffee mugs. Sa aking murang isip noon, dahil ang agila ay itinuturing na hari ng himpapawid, at ang asw ay kulay ng mga hari at reyna (as in “blue blooded”), “obvious” kaagad kung ano ang ibig sabihin ng agila asul: marangal, kinatatakutan, sikat, makapangyarihan. Matatalaw niyang kasi ang mga mata ng mga agila, at bukod sa maliksi, matayog kung lumipad. Yun bang kahit ordinaryong tshirt lang ang suot mo, basta may disenyong agilang asul, para bang nakakaangat ka na kaagad sa sinumang istudyante sa kalsada: “feeling” mo mas mataas ang uri mo, at maipagyayabang. Atenista lang naman kasi.

Kaya pala minabuti ng kulay berde ng unibersidad na matagal na nating karibal sa basketbol, na ilaranan ang sarili nilang “archers” o mamamana. Payabangan na kung payabangan. Ano nga ba naman...
Fly high,
blue eagle fly
and carry your cry
across the sky.

Cast your shadow below,
swoop down on the foe
and carry their fields away.

Kung dati, pampalakas-look lang sa mga Atenistang basketbolista ang agilang asul, sa pagdaan ng panahon naging simbolo na ito ng karakter Atenista. Narito ang paliwanag ng website ng Ateneo Grade School tungkol sa “blue eagle”: “The Blue Eagle symbolizes the Ateneo’s being a school that soars into the highest realms of truth and knows no fear.” Therefore, like the Eagle, Ateneans should ‘fly high’ and strive for excellence. They should lead and fight for what is right, and have the courage and determination of the Eagle swooping down on the foe.’ The Eagle lofty, majestic, fearless—should inspire Ateneans to be men who will lead.”


Ang Heswita Argentino na si Padre Jorge Mario Bergoglio, na ngayon ay mas kilala natin bilang Papa Francisco ang nagpasikat sa bokabularyo ng “SELF-REFERENTIALITY” at “institutional narcissism,” mga mentalidad na madalas niyang batikusin sa kanyang mga panayam. Ayon sa kanya, ito ay isang malubhang sakit na masarado sa simbahan.

Sa totoo lang, hindi ito nangyayari sa simbahan lamang. Pwede rin ring dapan ng ganitong sakit na ang alinmang makataong institusyon—sampilang ating mga paaralan o institusyong pang-akademiko. Ang pinakamalapit na salin nito para sa akin ay “PAGKAHUMALING SA SARILI.”

Salamat sa unang pagbasang nanirin natin kanina nabigyan ng kakaibang kahulugan ang agila. Mas detalyado ang talinghagang ito sa aklat ng Deuteronomio 32:6, 10–11:

Ganito ba ang igaganti mo sa iyong Panginoon, o bayang mangmang at walang isip? Hindi ba siya ang iyong ama, ang sa iyo’y may likha at pinagmumulan ng iyong lakas? ...Nataqpuan niya kayo sa ilang, isang disyertong maugong. Nilukuban niya kayo, kinalinga, pinakaingat-ingatan na parang sariling mga anak. Katulad ng agilang kinasasabikan ng kanyang mga inakay, lumulukob sa kanyang mga anak, iniunat niya ang kanyang mga pakpak at inilipad kayong nakatungtong sa kanyang mga bagwis.

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Congratulations, Batch 2018! We did it. Over our time here in college, we officially have met every last impossible deadline: All our readings and papers, multiple exams and orals in a day, and of course, those frantic runs from Bellarmine to CTC. When we live deadline-to-deadline, college life seemed rather unpleasant. So, wow, college is over! But if we slow down and look back on the last four years, we remember the awe-inspiring lectures, life-changing org engagements, and the steadfast friends who are now embarking on different life paths. Wow, college is over.

As we leave the Ateneo, we enter a complex and changing world with contradictions and paradoxes. All the while we are told to hold on to our values and stand firm with our mission. That sounds like fun. Despite the ambivalent feelings we have over graduating, though, there is one that should be clear. When we think about these memorable experiences, we celebrate. And at the heart of our joy is gratitude. Gratitude for the efforts of others we did not ask for or always deserve. Gratitude for selfless service we did not fully appreciate or can ever fully give back. But putting a face to the givers in our lives is a pretty good start. So to our parents, administrators, faculty, and staff, we offer our sincerest thanks. Without you, today and all the days leading up would not have been possible. Let’s give them a hand.

Okay, step one, accomplished. Now there’s just step two, which is everything else.

AN AWARENESS OF CHANGE

I remember when I told our Health Sci Program Director, Doc Sio, that I wanted to take a second major in Economics. He just looked at me and said, “You know something about you, Van? You don’t like change. You want the whole world wrapped up in neat, predictable theories and models.” I felt slightly offended. And I did what I think most of us would have done. “So I don’t like change, ah? I’ll show you how much I can dislike change.”

So I will tell you now that for two years, I refused to change. And that will be completely false. With the multitude of reflection papers we have written, I am sure we have realised that who we are now is not who we were when we entered the Covered Courts and sat in the mono-block chairs for OrSem Tuklas. Outwardly, this so-called end to our college experience is so similar to its beginning. Nothing has changed, and everything has changed.

That is the paradox of change. We do everything we can to avoid it. We become satisfied with doing the same thing, even if it isn’t the right thing. We preserve rituals and cling to unfulfilling relationships without taking stock of how they affect and constrain us. But consistency leads to complacency. As we rationalise superficial routines, we compromise what is within us: Our core values, the values that should anchor us against the ever-flowing, ever-fast current of change. In unassuming
ways, we make seemingly benign decisions that reflect our fear of change. How often do we take the time to discern before we make decisions? The world does not make it easy. It constantly demands our attention on things that seem urgent but are not really important. Think status updates and invitations to “connect.” Let us look at our careers. How many of us had decided to be doctors, lawyers, architects, or business people only because our parents have the same career, or we already know what it entails? How many of us are taking math or design only because that was who we were in high school? We follow familiar patterns because they feel safe. But from small decisions to big ones, this is tantamount to living on autopilot.

It is not easy to overcome the complacency that comes with familiarity. I started college unwilling to take risks. It was a slow, at times painful, process of opening myself up to the most spontaneous and unpredictable variable, other people. Sometimes, that meant being unsure of how they would react to me. Other times, it meant depending on them. All those times, it was worth it, because I was able to go beyond the limits I had prescribed myself, encounter others, and create genuine connections.

When we don’t become open to change, we become rigid and more likely to break under pressure. And there is a lot of pressure out there. We experience powerlessness in the face of seemingly immutable social structures and values. We turn on the news at night and see: extrajudicial killings, martial law in Marawi, and the quo warranto petition against the chief justice. In so many ways, we feel trapped in a system that does not work for so many people, where injustice is bought in bulk and apathy is the currency.

Paradoxically, it feels as though things are always changing and changing fast. Technological advances alter the way we consume information and our very definition of truth. When we hear people say the world is changing, they usually mean for the worse. That’s why nostalgia sells. Everywhere we look there is another reboot for Spider-Man, Batman, and even the Power Rangers. You just know at one point we’ll get a Barney and Sesame Street reboot, but totally gritty and dark.

But this is not our destiny. Not the gritty reboots; those will definitely happen. I am talking about how we are not powerless. Though the world is complex, we cannot let it passively change us. Problems are entrenched in huge systems that span political, cultural, social, and economic institutions. Let us meet that challenge with trans- and interdisciplinary. We are dynamic agents, willing to collaborate with different sectors.


**AN OPENNESS TO FAILURE**

While we undergo this journey of personal change, we are put to the test. The values that make us unique are measured against general standards that can never capture our totality. We are all guilty of looking for milestones to feel as though we are progressing. And we can only introduce ourselves in a few words while we struggle to be more than our neat, self-explanatory titles. Like Justine Malabanan, brilliant student and summa cum laude; Gabrielle Gabaton, COA sector-based cluster head and end-stage renal failure survivor; Jonathan Rodriguez, TnT Tours Head for OrSem Likha; and Magin Ferrer, president of the Ateneo Chemistry Society. Like Lance Gamboa, *summa cum laude* with double minors; Liam Lu, editor of *The Guidon’s “Beyond Loyola”*
section; Gabrielle Mesina, a brilliant director recognised by the Loyola Schools Art Awards; and Helena Baraquel, Ateneo Musicians' Pool's executive vice president for internal affairs. All of these titles are true, but they aren't all that they are. These students always ask you how you're doing. They have stood in solidarity protesting injustice. They have experienced that special giddiness after pulling an all-nighter and having 8AM class the next day. These are not things we can put on a résumé. In fact, sometimes these things don't feel productive. There doesn't appear to be a quantifiable performance indicator for being human, does there?

We cannot neatly package what matters most. There is overwhelming noise telling us, “This is what it means to be successful,” “to be happy,” “to live a good life.” The paradox of chasing these formulae is that we don’t define the very fulfilment we are scrambling to attain. We crave clarity so badly, but we end up oversimplifying ourselves instead. And in this worldview, failure is never an option. We glorify having no regrets, so we never let ourselves learn. Over the years we build up the pedestals we stand on. Every game won, every honour received, every story published, lifts us higher and higher from the ground that now, come graduation, the ground seems really far away. We look down and say, “A fall from this height will surely kill me; there is no way I can let myself fail.”

In college, I got the first F of my life. For years I had an image of myself built up from my fairly consistent track-record. I had expectations for myself, but it was a pressure that I wasn’t even aware existed because it built itself so gradually. After the failure hit, I realised the fear of failure felt far worse than failure itself. I was disappointed and sad, but I also started to examine where I went wrong and all I felt was a burning desire to quote-end-quote, “redeem” myself.

When we cannot accept that failure is a possibility, one integral to personal growth, we settle. We become satisfied with fulfilling standards instead of surpassing them. This leads to having mediocre jobs, draining relationships, and uninspired missions. The fear of failure is not a sign of humility; rather, it is an act of pride. We Ateneans hate the word “entitlement,” but there is an entitlement in telling ourselves that we cannot and do not deserve to fail. What makes us better or more special than the “other people” who at times will fall down? Without an openness to failure, we do not take risks, we do not aim higher, and we do not become resilient.

That is why, as a society, we become blind to our mistakes. We tell ourselves we are at the most advanced place we have ever been. We call it progress that we are getting things done faster. But are we becoming better? We are afraid to fail, but we are not perfect, so instead we fail but we are afraid to admit that we do.

This obsession with making sure there is not a single smear of failure in our lives speaks of an attempt we are all making. Whether we are aware or not, with each milestone and achievement, we are all constructing a legacy. We lean on impactful, catchy labels like “philanthropist,” “genius,” and “visionary,” to grasp for an identity. That's not wrong. What is detrimental is continually ignoring the parts of ourselves that do not adhere to the pedestal we want to construct. Then the fall looks more daunting. At times, we need to tear down these pedestals and take a step back. Only then can we reassess, and rebuild ourselves in the right way.

We construct an image of other people as well. For all of us, data collection is probably prosaic. But I think for most of us, that changes the moment we encounter our respondents. When, beyond the survey form, we find out they live alone because their children work late shifts; that they are afraid of getting hypnotised over the phone; that they are lonely and want to know what is going on these days.
Faced with this encounter, we want to go above what is asked of us, to listen, to be present. Legacies, then, are overrated. Through our mundane encounters with people, we develop our characters, recalibrate our actions, and evaluate our worldviews. Kilalanin natin ang ating kapwa, ‘di lamang alamin ang mga bagay tungkol sa kanila. Sa araw-araw nating pakikisalamuha, doon lamang tunay nating madarama ang kanilang paghihirap, maaunawaan ang kanilang kagalakan, at masasabayan ang kanilang pangarap.

**A COMMITMENT, LOVE**

So now, we are aware of the changes in ourselves and the world. We are open to failure as the beginning of true progress. All that is left is commitment. No big deal, right? Love is a commitment. When we love, we enjoy being a presence in others’ lives and having their presence in ours. Our parents had fulfilling lives and still choose to have us. Our friends have their own dreams and choose to include us in them and grow with us. Our teachers choose to re-design and make relevant their lessons class after class, semester after semester, to students who might be sleeping through the lecture. Our leaders have the skills to do the job on their own and choose to empower us.

Common to all of these is that love is a choice. And because it is a choice, the commitment means more. What motivates us to stay is not need but that we want to be there. We want to give the other person space to grow and change for the better. We have experienced others’ commitment to us throughout our college lives. Fresh in our minds is our immersion. In the three days or more that we spend with our communities, we see them at their most vulnerable. We are inserted directly into their homes and into their lives. They are aware that after the three days, it might not mean anything to us. But they commit to making us feel welcome and encountering us. Love and mission, then are one and the same. Love is why we decide to keep hoping even when times are hard. Mission is why we persevere against all odds. It’s okay to feel discouraged, helpless, and hurt. But those are feelings. Feelings pass, but our decisions and their consequences endure.

This is where all of the things come together. We can change and inspire change; we pursue what matters even if we might fail. Knowing all of this, sometimes despite knowing all of this, we choose to live a life of love. It sounds as though love is being a superhero: Always giving, always sacrificing. That’s not true. Because, as C.S. Lewis said, love is about being vulnerable. We want to give everything but trust the other person not to ask for something we cannot give. That is the point: We’re not perfect. We will hurt and disappoint one another, and ourselves. But we can choose to keep loving despite that. (Maybe not that same person, or under the same circumstances, but we can still love as a person.)

The same is true for our missions. At times we will fall short of what the mission asks of us. We will feel tired and disappointed and question our commitment. When I started college, I didn’t have a plan, much less a mission. Even after I became aware of multidisciplinarity in health and economics, I could not commit to it immediately. I did not feel I was enough for my mission. It was only through becoming vulnerable, and opening up to professors, alumnae, and friends, that I was able to prepare myself for it. I made mistakes, but gained so much experience as well. So accept vulnerability; you will be pleasantly surprised at how willing people are to help you get where you want to be.

This goes for our community, our country, and even the world. It feels as though everything is falling apart now. But we keep working and keep hoping because of love. We will keep protesting until we are
heard. The ouster of Chief Justice Sereno has spurred us to confront how we value our constitution and our liberties. We will keep informing until we have illuminated the truth. The Guidon continues to cover the environment of fear and violence in Marawi even a year later. We will keep transforming structures and systems until there is justice. Today, there are still lives being lost in the drug war, victims of detached public policy and also a fragmented health system, who are not even named and numbered. We cannot be there for every single person, but we can keep working to reduce vulnerabilities that the poor experience. We can build a Philippines that reaffirms through its arts what human dignity means, that aims to understand the lives and the needs of Filipinos, that establishes integrated and responsible businesses, and that innovates and develops sustainable and empowering solutions to local problems.

All of these are acts of love. All of these are a choice to commit to the mission to which we are all called. Ang pagmamahal ay pagpapahalaga: Paggpahalaga sa pagpili at pag-alay.

Sacrifice, then, is also overrated. When we sacrifice, we see the losses we incur. We pat ourselves on the back for being selfless. Rather than sacrifice, our mission is all about love. Frederick Buechner once said, our mission is where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep needs. In my immersion, I was called to attend to a nanay who suddenly experienced dizziness and nausea. I took her blood pressure and after hearing her medical history believed she might have had a mild stroke. With her friend, we rushed her to a clinic some 20 minutes away and I was asked to explain her condition to the attending physician. When the community heard what I had done, I spent the day clarifying the purpose of hypertension and maintenance medication to people afraid to take them. I was treated like a doctor by everyone, including my immersion groupmates. Ironically, entering college, I was absolutely certain I did not want to be a doctor. When I got back, everyone was telling me my experience was a sign I should go to med school, but when I reflected on what my heart desired, I knew it was not an MD. And when I discerned, though the world needed doctors, it also needed people who engaged problems concerning systems that spanned disciplines. Our deep gladness and the world’s deep needs.

The world needs real people, not efficient technicians, not even effective programs—but people who are self-aware and open to change, people who make small things count, people who love and commit to a mission; people who are glad to be doing so, people like you, like us. Our dear Ateneo, we are moved by your love, and we are moved to love. We change because we love and we are changed because we are loved. We are about to leave, but we will always remember. We are a bit sad, but we will always celebrate. We will have doubts, but we will always believe in our mission. So we make our commitments, to be better people, to find our missions, and to do them well. We don’t need more gritty superhero stories; we need people who keep the world turning despite the damage superheros do. I suppose that’s us; or rather, that is who we should commit to being. Again, congratulations Class of 2018. Thank you and good afternoon!
twenty-one years ago, a totally blind girl had no desire to study in the Ateneo, no aspiration to major in Mathematics, and no ambition to graduate with honors. Today, she is—I am—standing before you as a proud alumna of this great institution of excellence and service.

Now, I would like to take a slightly different approach in this commencement speech. Instead of sharing stories interspersed with ‘nuggets of wisdom’, I would like to tell you my story first, let you take from it what you deem is worth remembering, and then conclude with the insights I gained living this story. I believe that parts of it would resonate with you, even if you are not blind. As I said in my valedictory address in 2001, all of us experience some form of disability, mine is just more obvious than yours.

By my final year in high school, I was determined to study only in a university where the blind can graduate without being subjected to discrimination and prejudice. I decided that the Ateneo would not be the school for me when I learned that they have never had a blind student, unlike the University of the Philippines and the University of Santo Tomas. Those two were the only choices for me. My high school, however, encouraged their Top Ten to apply with all leading universities. I agreed to take the Ateneo College Entrance Test, in spite of my misgivings, and did not even bother with De La Salle University’s entrance exam. (Now why am I not surprised you think that’s funny?)

A couple of weeks before schools started posting their entrance test results, the Ateneo’s Office of Admission and Aid requested me to meet with their director then, Dr. Manuel Dy, Jr. He informed me that I passed the ACET and could study for any degree I desired with a full scholarship. He admitted they knew I applied with UP and UST, and that they were confident I would also pass their admission tests because, he pointed out, “Our entrance exam is much harder than theirs, and you did very well in the ACET,” so they wanted to convince me to choose the Ateneo before the other schools got in touch with me.

He also told me that the president, Fr. Ben, wanted me to consider majoring in Mathematics, which was not among the course options I indicated in my application. I told them I was not sure I could handle all the visual aspects of math (the graphs, charts and geometric illustrations). I was amazed when he said that they had already done some research into this and they were ready to purchase special equipment for producing materials in Braille and tactile format.

Outside the university, she received the Special Award of Recognition from the Ten Outstanding Students of the Philippines, the BPI Science Award, Jose Rizal Model Student of the Philippines, the Outstanding Youth Leaders Award from the United Nations Association of the Philippines, and the Everyday Heroes Award from Reader’s Digest Asia, among others.
would give me a private room to stay in during breaks, and would provide free hospitalization and eye surgery upon request. My parents did not pressure me to choose one school over the others. In fact, my dad, who was a consultant working on seismic instrumentation for PHIVOLCS, asked for advice from his colleagues—some of whom were UP and UST alumni, but none were Ateneans—as to which school I should pick. And every single one of them said, “Ateneo!”

For days, I prayed for discernment and guidance, but rather than giving me an answer, I felt like God kept throwing these questions at me: What difference would it make for the disability community if I choose UP or UST when their doors are already open to the blind? If I turn my back on the opportunity the Ateneo was giving me, how long would it take for another person with any kind of disability to get the same offer? In the end, it just felt wrong, irresponsible, cowardly, and ungrateful not to choose the Ateneo. And since I knew I was already taking a gamble, I went all in and enrolled as a Math major.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned in the Ateneo happened early on, in my freshman year, with Dr. Flordeliza Francisco and Math 21. She informed me that my pre-Finals grade was a B+, high enough that I could choose not to take the final exam unless I wanted to try raising that B+ to an A. I assured her I was happy with the B+, even though I was not, especially as I was confident of getting As in all my other classes that term. She told me to give myself some time to think about it. Intrigued that she seemed to be urging me not to give up so easily, I asked what was the score I needed in the final exam for that A, and she said, “189 out of 200.” As you know, a single question in a math test could be worth 20 points, so this meant I could answer all but one problem correctly and it might still not be enough. I took the finals and got an A! Much later, I found out that I scored 196 in that test; the 4-point deduction was for forgetting to indicate a hollow point on a graph. Yes, I still remember that! Dr. Francisco was a tough mentor, but also one of the best I had. That was the first of the five terms when I got straight As, and that A was only one of the 49 I got—yes, I also remember that number as it annoyed me that I did not make it a nice round 50. That A meant more than the rest though, not because I worked hard for it, but because I almost missed it, had it not been for a teacher who cared enough to make me remember why I should always commit myself to excellence and never settle for ‘good enough’.

My fear that teachers would be discriminatory, condescending or indifferent towards a disabled student did not become a reality. They knew I wanted to make the most out of my time in the Ateneo so they did not exempt me from doing Chemistry and Physics laboratory work on my own. They allowed modifications like when my father stuck Braille labels on lab equipment I could use, or when I brought modeling clay and bendable wires to create rather than draw 3-D representations of molecular geometry.

There was some preliminary discussion about exempting me from Physical Education. Then, one registration day, they found me in the queue signing up for fencing. They said, “Please, not fencing! You might accidentally kill your instructor!” My dad, who was accompanying me that day, said, “That’s what I told her when she asked first if there’s a class in archery!” NO worries—I did Ballroom Dancing that term and the instructor survived to give me an A.

Students, on the other hand, took a while to get used to having a blind classmate. Someone who became a friend only in my third year told me that he initially resented my taking tests in the same room and on the same schedule as the rest of the class. Apparently, since I was writing my answers in Braille (which means punching small holes into...
paper with a pointed stylus). I was, in his words, “Making noise that distracted others taking the test.” When he grew accustomed to this sound, however, he admitted I was motivating him to study harder for the exams, saying, “When I no longer hear you making any sound, I realize you’re done with the six-problem math test, but I’m still stuck on number 3!”

I suppose the other students saw me as a bit of an oddity, simply because they did not know how to relate to someone with a disability. There were some who thought I would be offended if they used words like ‘see’ and ‘look’, until I pointed out that it would sound sordid if, instead of saying, “I’m looking forward to seeing you again,” they would hit me with, “I’m feeling forward to touching you again.” Others, fascinated to hear me talk about the latest film releases, were curious enough to ask me to go with them when they see a movie one weekend... so off we went! I could sense how nervous and awkward they felt, especially when the ticket lady asked if I was joining them. To break the tension and remind everyone how I could still enjoy the movie despite being blind, I replied, “Yes, I’m with them, but maybe you could charge me just half the ticket price, since I will only get the audio and not the visual experience.” I explained to my new friends that they could help me ‘watch’ the film by describing whatever is happening and whoever is speaking. They gamely told me everything in excruciating detail, getting louder and more excited, particularly while describing the fight sequences and love scenes. We had lots of fun, and I think that was also when they began seeing me in a new perspective—as someone with special needs but who was normal after all.

When it came to joining student organizations and my extracurricular activities, I chose a different path. It started when The Ateneo asked me to meet with young people—children, mainly—who lost their eyesight due to cancer, kidney disease or some other cause, and to help them and their families cope with their altered circumstances. I realized then that I wanted to do activities where my being blind was significant. I worked with organizations outside the Ateneo to train blind high school and college students in the use of specially adapted technologies. I also did some advocacy work, speaking to parents of blind children about sending them to school, and to other school administrators and even to small business owners who had questions about teaching or hiring the disabled. Most of these personal projects were not linked with any student group in the Ateneo, however. There were people then, not knowing about these projects, who criticized me for being part of only a few student organizations and activities, when I was selected class valedictorian.

I was not aware that graduating seniors were invited to vote for whom they wanted to be their valedictorian, so I was surprised when I was asked to submit my credentials and an essay on a topic I cannot recall anymore. When I heard that it was possible to opt out of the screening process, I decided not to submit the requested documents. One evening, I received a phone call from then Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Mr. Rene Salvador San Andres, who told me they were waiting for me to hand in my papers. Not wishing to be difficult, I finally did as asked, and even showed up for the interview with the Committee on Standards.

I found out later that not only did I get most of the student votes, but that one of the candidates interviewed—a fellow summa cum laude graduate, from the School of Humanities—submitted an essay not on the designated topic but one titled, “Why I Think Roselle Ambubuyog Should be Class Valedictorian.” This person whom I had never met during our four years in the Ateneo, gave up the chance to be the class
valedictorian herself, and made me see how foolish my reluctance was in this matter. In a conversation with Dr. Queena Lee-Chua—to whom I will always be grateful for teaching me more than just Probability Theory and Statistics—I confessed that I did not want people to think I was selected to be valedictorian because my blindness made me seem special. She assured me that I deserved this distinction for what I have achieved, and advised me not to underrate the inspiration I have given the Ateneo community for there was much that people can learn from my story.

I hope she was right. Much of this speech is a testimonial because I wish to encourage you to do what I have just done: to look back at your life in the last four or five years, and discover the experiences, the people, the insights, the choices that brought you to this point today, and then reflect on how all of these have prepared you for the life and challenges ahead.

I was sure I wanted a career in Actuarial Science and was pursuing a graduate degree in that field when again, God made me see that He had other plans for me. I received a job offer from the Vice President of Software Engineering at Freedom Scientific. They are a US company based in Florida, and the leading developer of both software and hardware products designed to help people with reading-related challenges such as blindness, low vision, and dyslexia. By this time, I had received several offers to work for multinational and local companies, but this one piqued my interest because of what they wanted me to do and why they were asking me to do it.

One of the most important products they make is called a screen reader. It is a software application that conveys what text and nontextual information are displayed on the screen to a user who is unable to see or read. This is done through text-to-speech output, or as Braille dots simulated using round-tipped pins that are raised or lowered through holes on the flat surface of Braille displays. It is not the same as virtual assistants like Apple’s Siri or Microsoft’s Cortana. Through keyboard operation or touchscreen gestures, a blind user can do a whole lot more with a screen reader. What they hired me to do was to provide the design specifications of a screen reader that can speak and focus on different parts of math and science notations. In other words, my first job needed me specifically because I am both blind and a math graduate. I left Actuarial Science for what some refer to as the Access Technology field, a specialized part of the IT industry.

Over the years, I have worked on other projects and for other Access Tech companies abroad, all from the comfort of my home. I have helped develop screen readers for smartphones on different platforms, apps that identify or describe what can be seen in photos, and talking GPS navigation apps that provide pedestrian routes for the blind. Among our customers are blind celebrities like the multi-talented musician Stevie Wonder, the operatic tenor Andrea Bocelli, and the intrepid mountaineer Erik Weihenmayer who climbed the world’s Seven Summits. However, what gives me the sense that I am accomplishing something worthwhile and deserving of the passion I put into my work is the appreciation from ordinary people whose lives have improved drastically because of our products.

There is the blind, deaf, and mute girl whose multiple disabilities made it impossible for her to use a mobile phone and communicate with most people, until I designed the Braille interface for the mobile screen readers produced by Code Factory of Barcelona, Spain. She now has several friends and is on social media. There are the soldiers blinded in the war in Afghanistan who, despite all the psychotherapy sessions, only regained their hope when they were trained to use computers again
with our products. There are also the people who were delighted by the
color recognition app we made initially just to give blind people some
use out of their smartphone’s camera. It turned out that this app, which
would describe the colors of an object after a picture is taken, enabled
them to sort the contents of their closets or cupboards without sighted
assistance. These days, we have image recognition apps that can do
more for the blind, namely, identify the coins and banknotes of different
currencies, read printed texts like on street signs and book covers, and
describe people and scenery. I have discovered that such apps quite
inadvertently have a sense of humor sometimes. When I ran the photos
of my pet dogs through one, it correctly identified the breeds of my
Golden Retriever, Yellow Labrador, and Rottweiler. But when I showed
it the picture of an Askal/Aspin mongrel, I swear it seemed to hesitate
for a second before tactfully saying, “Brown dog.”

Incidentally, I would like to take this opportunity to ask you to
consider donating your laptops and mobile devices to blind people,
especially students, when you are ready to replace them with a
graduation gift or the new gadgets that would come with your first job.
I mention this because I realize that blind people would not be your
first choice of beneficiaries if you suppose they are unable to use regular
technology. Well, there are now free, open-source and even built-in
screen readers for Windows, Macos, Linux, Android and ios, so be
assured that blind Filipinos will find much use for your old stuff.

I would like to spend the last part of my speech satisfying those
who are still asking, “So where are the nuggets of wisdom we expect
to hear in a typical commencement speech?” There are a few points I
would like to expound on a little, insights that have given me a deeper
understanding of life, that I hope would help you ‘see’ your way better
in the years to come.

1. “MAN PROPOSES, BUT GOD DISPOSES.”

I think the Book of Proverbs explains this best with the verse: “The
human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.” (Prv.
16:9—NRSV-CE) I am not saying that we should forget about free will
and just wait for the Lord to shove us towards wherever He wants us
to go. Remember that God has designs for each of us that may not be
immediately evident. His reasons and plans were certainly not obvious
to me when I lost my eyesight at the tender age of six, nevertheless, I
now have more to be grateful for than to complain about.

As you make your own plans for the future, have faith in divine
providence. Even if some of your efforts lead to a disappointing
outcome, trust that the Lord’s purpose for that part of your life has been
fulfilled, and learn what you can from that experience to gain more
wisdom, courage, and strength.

2. VALUE SIGNIFICANCE OVER SUCCESS.

As you stand at the threshold of your life after the Ateneo, you have
dreams of success. Everyone expects you to succeed in whatever you
undertake—you are Ateneans after all, and this university’s reputation
will always precede you. And, of course, there is nothing wrong with
success and wanting it. Just remember that living your life purely for
success can leave you vulnerable to the fear of failing sooner or later, and
of feeling unfulfilled in spite of all you have attained.

When I decided to study in the Ateneo, I took a risk, and when the
Ateneo welcomed me as their first blind student, they took a risk. Our
choices were not based on a certainty of success, but on the possibility
of significance. Promise yourself now that whatever happens, you will
strive to live a life that matters and is worth emulating.
3. Do not let your vision become a mere delusion.

A speech to graduates invariably includes a mention of ‘vision’, more so, I believe, if the speaker is blind. Yes, I am blind, not ‘vision-impaired’ which sounds delusional, or even ‘visually impaired’ which I suspect is a euphemistic way of calling someone ugly. Seriously though, this is my vision: A better world for people with disabilities built on the foundation of equal opportunity, innovative technology, and a compassionate, inclusive society. Does it sound realistic enough not to be considered a delusion? Yes, a world like that definitely took shape on a smaller scale in the Ateneo from 1997 to 2001.

A vision becomes just a delusion when you are no longer focused and passionate for it. Set goals that establish a clear direction to this end, uphold core values in every action and decision, and do not allow yourself to be distracted or disheartened.

4. Face adversity with fortitude and gratitude.

Meeting challenges head on with fortitude, which for me means courage plus endurance, needs no explanation, I believe. But what does gratitude have to do with it?

One of the first things my blindness has taught me is to be grateful and not take for granted who and what I have in my life. When I would have wallowed in denial and misery, gratitude that I only lost my sight and not my life or loved ones taught me acceptance and perseverance. When people’s prejudice and discrimination could have turned me into a person full of hatred and self-pity, gratitude for the love and support of my family taught me forgiveness and resilience. Therefore: Fortitude + Gratitude = a Winning Attitude.

Always take time to be grateful, letting your thanks flow from your hearts as well as from your lips, for your parents, mentors and, if you are one of the 381 graduating scholars, your benefactors—for what the Ateneo as a whole has done for you. Speaking of which... Thank you, Fr. Ben, for recommending BS Math for me and trusting I would fit well in the Ateneo. Thank you to all my teachers, especially those in the Math Department (Dr. Catherine Vistro-Yu and the others). Thank you to the Ateneo Schools Parents Council for my scholarship, and to Dr. Dy, Fr. Nemy and the OAA staff for taking good care of us scholars. Thank you to my parents and brothers for everything. When, in future, you find yourself going against seemingly insurmountable odds, recall how these people did not give up on you and how much you owe it to them not to give up either.

5. Hope is your sight, not the light, in the dark.

I often hear hope being compared to that spark of light you see in times of darkness, as though hope was something elusive outside of us, to be sought desperately. My experiences have taught me that hope is the ability to see there is light despite the darkness. That means despair and the temptation to give up stem from the inability to see in the dark of life.

I read that in the Philippines, a predominantly Catholic country, mental health experts say that each day, at least six persons end their own lives, and there are more and more suicides among children and teens. Dr. Queena, who also teaches Psychology here, tells me that even the Ateneo, with many kids from privileged families, is also concerned with a disturbing increase in the number of students with suicidal tendencies needing counsel.

Let me tell you something... My life as a blind person has never been easy, and it got harder when in February of last year, my father whom you have heard me mention a number of times as I shared my story,
died from an accident that occurred within the safety of our home. Not only has my faith in God’s plan and benevolence been shaken, but the resilience that has kept me bouncing back from every adversity throughout the years has been tested repeatedly in the last 15 months and 12 days. The pain of losing him is far worse than the pain I felt when I lost my eyesight.

When I got off that phone call from the Ateneo asking me if I could be this year’s commencement speaker, the first thing I did wasn’t to tell my mom the news, or to freak out over what to say in my speech. It was to burst into tears, because my dad was no longer around to see this day come. He loved the Ateneo, you know, possibly more than I ever had, since he didn’t have to prepare for Philosophy oral exams. He did not actually stay with me in class, but he did drive me to school each day, went into the library to read for me if I needed to do some research, and picked me up at the end of my class hours, whatever time of the day that happened to be. Admin and faculty members here today who have been around since the late 90s can attest to this, that Papa was seen a lot in the Ateneo. Some even suggested—jokingly or not, I don’t know—that he should have received a diploma as well when I graduated. And if I am counting the years correctly, I think I gave a talk to EN10 freshman students about four years ago, so some of you must have seen him, too, since he always went with me to my speaking engagements.

Just as my father taught me not to let my blindness destroy my life, I will not let the disability of hopelessness—this spiritual blindness—ruin me. If you ever find yourself dealing with this kind of disability, have faith that there is light to see, push your way through the pain, look to others for support, harbour gratitude, and hold on.

Well, I do not wish to end on that sad note, so please bear with me for one last insight.

6. DESIRE TO INSPIRE, AND SERVE WITHOUT RESERVE.

Never underestimate your capacity to inspire and be inspired. You do not need to be extraordinary people or perform extraordinary feats of heroism. You can inspire as ordinary people who are willing and ready to do what is right, just and good extraordinarily well. But with the way things are going in this country now, am I asking you for miracles? Perhaps... The deafblind author and inspirational speaker Helen Keller once said, “When we do the best that we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.”

Giving inspiration can come in different forms, but the most guaranteed way will always be through service. A commencement speech given in the Ateneo will not be complete without exhorting the graduates to continue being men and women for others. I ask you to be of service wholeheartedly and not to define limits on what you can do or whom you can serve. Commit to excellence in service and don’t settle for “good enough.”

When I ask for the light of God’s guiding wisdom, more often than not, He leaves me with questions to find the answers in my heart. So, I leave you now with a question: If a blind person can do all this, accomplish everything you heard this afternoon, just imagine... How much more can you, who are not blind, achieve?

I wish you all the best, dear graduates. Congratulations and may God bless you always!
I am sadly, not a graduate of Ateneo, nor have I taught here. And so I only know Ateneo through the Ateneans I have met and worked with. It’s easy to conclude that a person is Atenean because of their seriousness of purpose and the confidence with which they carry themselves.

When Fr. Jett invited me to be your commencement speaker today, I was deeply humbled and grateful that Ateneo would deem me worthy of this honor. And then I proceeded to do what any accomplished, Stanford-educated person like myself would do: I went to Google and typed in “Best commencement speech ever.” After a healthy dose of Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs, JK Rowling, and other brilliant minds, I ended up with a list of things commencement speakers tell graduates: persevere, follow your dream, accept failure as a part of success. I think those are all popular messages around commencement time because they truly make for sound advice. But I have decided that the times call for another message, that may seem funny coming from me but is absolutely relevant: be Atenean.

What does it mean to be Atenean? Last week, I talked to my brother, Agno, who graduated from Ateneo with a degree in Philosophy. Siya lang ang Atenista sa pamilya at siya rin ang pinakamayabang sa aming lahat. But I know the source of his self-confidence. Agno, who will kill me after this speech because I talked too much about him, was never the academic type when he was growing up. He only went to school to socialize and thought low of himself. But Ateneo changed all that. In his words, this is the institution where he enjoyed education. What a supreme compliment to all his teachers. In one Philosophy subject, his professor told them they could possibly get an A if they wrote an extra paper. My brother thought that even with bonus points from this extra paper, it was impossible for him to get an A and so he decided not to do it. Upon realizing that Agno did not submit his paper, his professor called him at home and told him to write the paper as his grades could get him an A. That was a turning point for him as he felt that someone believed in him more than he himself did. That is being Atenean: you have utmost confidence in your abilities, in the education you received, and this drives you to dream big and do great things. Wield this self-confidence not only at work, but also when you help others.

How else can you be Atenean? I remember when I was in graduate school, Fr. Ben came to visit the Ateneo alumni who were doing graduate studies in Stanford. And I remember feeling so envious. Imagine the president of your University coming to check on you and treating you to dinner. I soon realized that this was part and parcel of being Atenean. Look around you—Ateneo has afforded you a community of peers, professors, and alumni who will remind you of the Ignatian ideals and the level of excellence that you have to maintain in your respective fields. Most of all, the Ateneo community cares and protects its own. It rejoices and cries collectively.
Looking back, I do believe that that encounter with Fr. Ben was one of the reasons why, when I founded The Raya School with my husband in 2005, we endeavored the building of the same kind of community. A community of caring teachers and parents around the children entrusted to us. We protect their childhood, we celebrate their individuality and their rich heritage as Filipinos, we assure them that they are never alone. And then we hope, that because they were happy and cared for in Raya, they will be wonderful human beings and enlightened Filipinos when they graduate.

But this sense of community in Raya, and in Ateneo, will be useless if it is not coupled with a true sense of country. And I know this is not lost on Ateneo, ever since five Ateneo undergraduates came out with their manifesto, “Down from the Hill” in November 1968.

Those five Ateneans were Jose Luis Alcuaz, Gerardo Esguerra, Emmanuel Lacaba, Leonardo Montemayor, and Alfredo Salanga. Montemayor and Lacaba were The Guidon editors. The manifesto pushed for, in the authors’ words, the Filipinization of Ateneo.

And I quote—

Filipinization is relevance. It is the process of making things relevant to the Philippine situation.

A revolutionary situation exists in the Philippines because the present social, political, and economic order does not make for a just society. These are self-evident. That a power elite controls government for its own interests over and above those of the great majority of our countrymen. And this same power elite maintains an unequal distribution of the nation’s wealth, which action is unjust because of the great disparity existing between the rich and the poor...

This new orientation is truly Filipino because it addresses itself to the masses that seek justice, and not to the power elite that impedes its promotion. And because it speaks of real justice, it cannot but be truly Christian. Thus, to be truly Filipino is to be truly Christian. Love of neighbor does not exist in paternalistic donations, which are mere palliatives for our society’s ills. Rather, it is a rendering of justice, a commitment to cure society’s ills at its roots.
The condemnation of the present social, political, and economic order that does not make for a just society is therefore a Christian duty. The commitment to national development for the ordering of a just society is a Christian commitment. (Alcuaz, Esguerra, et al., 1968)

“Down from the Hill,” in my opinion, could have been written in 2018. There is a degradation of morals, a twisting of truth, and widespread injustice. Most Filipinos are demoralized and frustrated with recent events, but they are afraid to speak up. And I believe that Ateneans, mentored by the very best minds and nurtured in this very special community, will not be overwhelmed by this culture of fear. Our present national situation calls for a revolution, and quoting the manifesto again, “Ateneans have the moral and intellectual obligation to lead it.”

Batch 2018, these are difficult times and so your country asks you to muster everything that Ateneo has given you: all your magis and your cura personalis. Be the voice of the voiceless and the courage of the weak. Be truth. Be hope. Resist!

I leave you with an excerpt from the poem, “Sa Karimlan” by a faculty member of your school of management, poet Kristin Militante:

May kaligtasan na nakakamit sa karimlan. Milyun-milyong dolyar madaling itago sa mata ng bayan. Mga ebidensya ng pagpaslang, madaling pumanaw sa kawalan ng liwanag.


Ngunit patuloy ang daloy ng dugo ng mamamayan, habang ikaw ay mahimbing na natutulog diyan. Kung akala mo, ligtas ka na, nakakalimot ka:

Hindi nakakatakas ang dilim sa salita. (Militante, 2017)

Maging mahuhusay na Filipino, Batch 2018. Maraming salamat po.
Ateneo Law School
You cannot imagine how overwhelmed I am to be speaking before all of you today. I promise that isn’t just a cliché or an exaggeration that I put in just so I can have an introduction in my speech; my heart is literally pounding as I read the lines that I chose to say this afternoon.

What I’m about to say will come as no surprise to many of you. I am an openly homosexual law school graduate. I was bound to stick it in there somewhere, and then I thought, well, why not start with that. And to be honest, it’s a relief to be able to say that now without feeling shame, without fear of backlash, without choking midsentence the way that I did when I first came out to my family. Certainly not everybody from the LGBT community is as blessed with the same circumstances as I am.

It wasn’t always this easy though. When I was growing up, I was made to believe that homosexuality was a weakness that you’d best conceal. For a long time, I was made to believe that members of the LGBT community could never be anything beyond mere providers of entertainment. The moment you come out, you would never make CEO, President. Definitely not Senior Partner at a law firm. After all, society itself has charted your destiny to become a marginalized, second class citizen.

Who I am was a caveat that was better left unsaid, an irredeemable flaw that was nothing to be proud of, and everything to be ashamed about. So I told myself, don’t you ever make the mistake of telling anybody. Don’t come out. Fake it.

And so I did.

I felt like a prisoner in my own skin. And in the many years that I pretended to be someone I was not, I yearned to show that we were more than what society has set us out to be. I longed for the day when people like me would be judged by what we do for society, not by who we do in society.

So I made a commitment. 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.

**ASIL and Law School**

For me, that path appeared when I learned about the Ateneo Society of International Law, or ASIL for short, and all the moot court competitions they’ve won in the US, in Hong Kong, and in Japan. As if going to law school wasn’t crazy enough, I did what any sensible student would have done: I joined ASIL in my second year.

But oh em, I had absolutely no idea what I just got myself into. Apparently, ASIL was a kind of crazy that I wasn’t prepared for physically, mentally, and emotionally. Training for moot competitions would usually start at 9pm after class, end at 12 midnight on a very light day, and I kid you not 5am on the bloodiest of training days. As
in nakikita na naming may nag fufun run sa labas ng Ateneo, pauwi pa lang kami. Gano kalala, I’d get a few hours of sleep, wake up to my alarm at 7am, and then take out my books and assigned cases for the day. For three years, that was pretty much my life. Read for school in the morning, go to class in the afternoon, train for competitions at night.

Now before I start sounding like I’m glorifying the busy-ness of it all, let me tell you it was anything but glorious. There were many days when my body either protested from lack of sleep or threatened to collapse from sheer exhaustion, all the while trying to memorize facts-issues-held. There were nights when I would go through Facebook or Instagram, and I would get so jealous because friends were either in Siargao, or climbing Mt. Batulao, or even just drinking at Barcino, while I was in Room 316 struggling to research and to finish our team’s memorial.

It was honestly the kind of life that got alienating.

Not a lot of people know this, but I developed an unwanted habit of crying in my car while driving to school. In some of those drives, I would really call out to heaven and ask, “Lord, tama pa ba tong ginagawa ko? Kasi ngarag na ngarag na ako. Parang, parang hindi na siya masaya.” The temptation to fake a sickness, to cut class, and to ditch training became more and more welcome as the days stretched on. On the darkest of those days, I even thought about quitting competing altogether. I started to secondguess whether all that hustling was really necessary. I mean, my life would be so much easier, so much happier, if I just admitted to myself that I wasn’t built of stronger stuff. I could just charge it to human failure, and never look back.

But the minute I filled my head with visions of my dreams—the dream of becoming not just an ordinary lawyer, but the best lawyer that I could become, the dream of showing our country that we from the LGBT community can be meant for greater things too—all those doubts that crippled me, the uncertainties that kept me stuck in a rut, they were all silenced. And by the time I got to PowerPlant, I would pull myself together and gear up for the warzone that is Ateneo Law School. I told myself, sa totoo lang ginusto mo yan diba, kaya kapit lang besh, bahala na! Whatever happened, it was NOT in my blood to quit. Game face on.

That was how I survived. I visualized, visualized, visualized. I constantly reminded myself of my ‘why’s’—why I kept fighting, why I kept getting up in the morning instead of sleeping in, why I kept highlighting kahit umay na umay na ako sa cases. And my oh my, did that pay off. In 2017, the Ateneo Jessup Team bested powerful teams like UP and USC, and won back the National Championships for the school. And well, against all odds, I was graced enough to be standing here today.

This is where my commitment has brought me. The journey really really tested my limits, but it was all worth it because, in my own way, I was able to show that we from the LGBT community—hindi kami shushunga shunga, kaya rin namin. Despite the baptism by fire that I had to brave, I know in my heart that I would do it all over again.

When we go out into the real world, we’re all going to make our own commitments, the same way I did when I entered law school. Commitment to the cases we’ll handle, commitment to the families we’ll raise, commitment to the dreams that we’d like to see become a reality. What can I tell you now that will make these commitments easier, if not more meaningful?

In ASIL, one of the very first techniques we learn is to limit our speeches to only our strongest points. In the same fashion, allow me to share with you three points from my experience, which I hope would serve as useful references, for when you decide to stick it out with your commitments.
MYTH OF SISYPHUS

First point. Remember the Myth of Sisyphus when life knocks you down. For those not familiar with the myth, basically, Sisyphus was cursed by the Greek Gods to push a heavy boulder up a mountain. The catch, though, was that every time he’s about to reach the top, the boulder comes rolling down the mountain back to the ground. Sisyphus then has to pick up that same boulder, and repeat the same action of climbing for eternity.

The struggle of Sisyphus is absurd, but what I liked about it is how it tells so much about our own. In life, we’re all going to have our own boulders to carry. As we make our way up the mountain, the world will be unrelenting in the failures, setbacks, and fiascos that it will throw our way. When we fall off our mountain, maybe when we’ve just had it with the bar or even beyond, I hope we remember Sisyphus, and that the choice will always be ours. Either we wallow in self-pity and let the boulder stay on the ground, or we pick that boulder up and aim for the sky. Our hearts will be judged, not by what we do when we reach the top and everybody is celebrating, but by how willing we are to get up when we’re down, and to just roll with the punches. Because contrary to what many people think, failure is just a bruise, not a disability. And a setback can be the perfect setup for a comeback, if we make it happen. Trust in yourself, trust in the process, and know in your heart that it will be worth it when you reach the summit.

SELF-ENTITLEMENT

Second point. 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.

FOR ALL THE GOOD PEOPLE

My last point is something I picked up from my Jessup teammates. Third and final point. Do everything that you love for all the good people. I mean 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. Make no mistake, 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. So the next time we find ourselves struggling to push our boulders up the mountain, when our body is ready to let go, remember that there is an entire barangay behind you, and that you are not alone. Think. This is for them. This is for all the good people. And I promise you: you will make that climb.

So what are my three points again? First, remember Sisyphus when life knocks you down. Second, say no to entitlement. And third, do it for all the good people. Always. Climb high, Batch 2018! And congrats to you all!
Congratulations to our Ateneo de Manila School of Law Graduates of 2018. Congratulations to the graduates for the Masters in Law. Congratulations to the Juris Doctor graduates. After 4 long years of College and 4 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—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 8 of you: Trinca, Colene, Chris, Mitch, Paula and Luisa, Marianne, and Kathleen.

I asked them to share of 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 nor exams. But also much anxiety—as you still have the bar in November. Our conversation kept going back and forth between your hopes and expectations—life after the bar—and anxiety over the next 5 months preparing for the bar and 6 more months of waiting for the results.

You are right, of course, to be anxious about the bar. I will not tell you that you are from Ateneo, and we have given you the best education and the bar should be a cinch. Because you know it will be a challenge. Though, of course, you told me that you believe your class can make it 100%. Right?

Yes, passing the bar is very important. It will open many doors for you. I too spent many years in challenging studies and very difficult examinations. Success in them has opened doors for me. Doing well in the bar will open doors too for you.

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.

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 CLC many years ago. One of them said that his office mates would invite him for inuman after work—and he always declined. One of his officemates...
First, We Go Down

FR. BEN NEBRES, SJ
PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARK LAWRENCE B. CRUZ

After serving as President, he has continued to serve as Professor of Mathematics at the Ateneo de Manila, and is engaged in various programs to help overcome poverty in the country: improving public education in over 400 public schools with the Ateneo Center for Educational Development (aCed) and in over 200 municipalities, particularly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, with Synergeia Foundation; building homes and communities for the poor with Gawad Kalinga; and supporting young people engaged in social enterprises for poor communities.

He is presently Rector of the Jesuit Residence, Ateneo de Manila University, a member of the Board of Trustees of Ay Foundation, Inc., Center for Leadership and Change, Inc., Gawad Kalinga, nCM Mutual Fund of the Phils., Inc., Synergeia Foundation, Inc., Ateneo de Iloilo, Georgetown University and the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (uBCHea).

Fr. Nebres did his early studies in classics and philosophy in the Jesuit Scholasticate, Berchmans College, and completed an AB and MA in philosophy. He obtained a PhD in mathematics from Stanford University.
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 to encounter the reality of the majority of our people. You will find that as early as 5 am nakapila na ang mga mahihirap sa bahay ng mayor. May receta para sa maysakit na anak, humihingi ng pambayad sa lising 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 many years ago if we could donate Christmas foodpacks for the 400 poorest families in her school. We gave just a 100 peso foodpack—noodles, sardines. She said, “This will last a family of 5 three 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 till today.

Dr. Carmela Oracion 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 revived 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 fishes 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 fishes, 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 RA 11037, a bill entitled Masustansyang Pagkain Para sa Batang Pinoy. It mandates providing a meal for 120 days for children 3-5 in daycare centers and for undernourished children in K-6. For this year there is a national budget of 3 billion for daycare and over 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. Not yet enough to address chronic hunger nor to take care of babies in the first 1,000 days, but a major step forward. We still have to work on the IRR and maybe you can help us there.

This law is the culmination of a journey that actually started several years ago from the ground.

11 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 schools. This provided the opportunity for a breakthrough innovation, developed by Dr. Carmela Oracion of Ateneo Center for Educational Development (ACED). 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 the 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 schoolday.

Gawad Kalinga went to Leyte in 2014 after Yolanda and the people said, “Thank you for thinking of building homes for us. Pero baka pagdating 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 schoolfeeding in Mamasapano and Rajah Buayan.

When the Marawi war started in May 2017, DepEd 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 with, 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.

Today in 2018, 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 schoolfeeding 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 de Manila Law 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 schoolday at 3 or 4 am to cook the meals and wash the dishes after, 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 and in the provinces ₱15. 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 Heights. When my students ask why they sacrifice so much without remuneration, they say, “Iniisip 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 schoolfeeding no longer depends only on Ateneo, GK, and Jollibee.

- Governor Uy of Compostela Valley is building in all the towns of Compostela Valley.
- Governor 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 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 at the ground. Just think of all our OFWs 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 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.

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

So till 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 batch mates, 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 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 School of Law Class of 2018.

May our Lord and our Lady watch over you in the coming months before the bar and in the many years of service and achievement that lie ahead of you.
Ateneo School of Medicine & Public Health
Hindi madaling pagkasyahin ang limang taon sa isang sampu hanggang dalawampung minutoing talumpati. Paano mo nga ba ibubuod ang mga taon ng saya, paghihirap, takot, pagkakaibigan, pagmamahal, at pagkakaisa? Ano nga ba ang mga tamang salitang makapagbibigay buhay sa mga aral at karanasan na sama-sama nating pinagdaanan para sa ating pangarap sa mga nakaraang taon?

Alam ko kung gaano na kalaki ang pressure at pagod natin sa paghahanda sa nalalapit na board exams, kung hanggang anong oras tayo natutulog at gumigising para lamang mag-aral at matapos ang mga backlog natin. Kaya't sa talumpating ito, sa halip na magtuon sa mga payo at leksyon para sa hinaharap na hindi pa natin gaanong maaning ay pansamantala muna tayong umatras at balikan ang mga bagay, tao, at pangyayari na bumuo sa mga MD-MBA na kaharap ko ngayon.

Maraming bagay ang nangyayari sa atin na hindi natin inaasahan. Sa totoo lang, at siguro alam naman ng iba, hindi ko naman talaga inaasahan na ako ang magsasalita dito sa entablado ngayon. Sino nga ba'ng mag-iisip na ang isang maliit, mahiyain, at tahimik na katalad ko ang magsasalita sa pagtatapos ng Batch 2018? Pero nandito na tayo. Kung sino man tayo ngayon at kung ano man ang naabot natin ay bunga ng dalawang bagay—dalawang bagay na nais ko magpasaya sa entablado na to—1) mga desisyong buong malay nating ginagawa at 2) mga pagkakataon na hindi natin inaasahan na ang ating buhay bawat isang taon.


“Ano'ng gusto mong maging paglaki mo?”

Hayaan ninyong magbahagi ako sa inyo ng isang simpleng kwentong maayos nang inilibi ako ng isang batchmate sa area visit sa ESKWELA. Wala naman ako ng isang gigawa kaya sumama naman ako. Pumunta kami sa GK sa Payatas para magturo ng nutrisyon sa mga pre-school children. Nasulyapan ko ang isa sa mga barang kasali na payat at mukhang nanghihina. Napansin ko na naghihinder sa inyo kanyang nanay sa labas ng silid aralan na pinagtuturan namin.


At sumagot siya, “Mahirap lang po kami eh, wala nga po kaming Bambili ng pagkain na higit na sa isang araw.”


_NAMILI. NAGPASYA. NAGTAYA._


_Pero sa ikatlong ng mga mayalay na desisyon ito ay mga bayan, totoong pangalawa at nang iyong sanhi ng ating pagkilos. Saksi ng bawat paglaban ay mga iyong insan sa kung katotohanan. Marami ito ay mabat pa lamang nangayari sa ating. Ito ay ‘yung mga tiyong hindi inaakala ngunit nangayari, na kung baabalikan ay nagdadala sa atin ng karung-yan at sa kung lanang kahanga-hangang. ‘Yung mga pagkakaataon sa pagpatuloy ng mga nang iyong sanhi ng ating pagkilos._


_Doktor, pwede ba ako rin na pagkatotoo? Pareho po na ang isang sining._" Para matapos na, pareho ko na sa ilang tinek-up at bigyang gamot. Ang dami pang nakkapilya, baka hindi na naman kami makapagtrahlahian. Pagkabigay ko, hindi agad umalis ang pamiliya._


Maliban sa inyo, nandyan din ang ating mga pamilya. Hindi ko na mabilang kung nakakailang missed calls na ang Mommy ko sa akin para lamang magkasubukan ng bagay at nagpadala ni ate-kuya sa Rayhans; hanggang sa “Uy, idol intern,” mula sa ating mga naging clerks; pati na rin sa “Ang galing, sharpshooter ka pala Dokie,” mula sa mga nurses; o sa simpleng salamat ng residente para sa isang buong araw ng pagrorounds sa TMC. Dahil sa mga random na bagay na nagiging pasasalamat na lang kayo, doon na rin ako na natahimik na naman ako. Iyon ang una kong PF.


Salamat sa aking mga naging mentor—sina Doc Sio Marquez, Ma’am Gemma Marin, at Doc Henri dela Cruz para sa pakiling at pagbibigay ng mga payo para sa ating pagkatao. Salamat sa lahat ng mga guro, consultants, at mga residente na nagpadala ni ate-kuya sa Rayhans; hanggang sa “Uy, idol intern,” mula sa ating mga naging clerks; pati na rin sa “Ang galing, sharpshooter ka pala Dokie,” mula sa mga nurses; o sa simpleng salamat ng residente para sa isang buong araw ng pagrorounds sa TMC. Dahil sa mga random na bagay na nagiging pasasalamat na lang kayo, doon na rin ako na natahimik na naman ako. Iyon ang una kong PF.

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Sixty-nine (69)

Sa lahat ng mga hindita ko nabanggit pero naging malaking bahagi ng paglalakbay ko, maraming salamat din.

Ngayon, hayaan ninyong magtapos ako sa apat na puntos na maaaring marinig nyo na minsan sa buhay ninyo.

**Unity in Diversity** Magkakaiba man tayong tao noong pumasok sa ASMPH, pinagbuklod na tayo ngayon ng isang karanasan—na binubuo ng maraming mga sandali at aral na hindi natin malilimutan. Gustuhin man natin o hindi ay magkakahiwa-hiwalay na tayo pagkatapos nito.

**Walang Iwanan 2018** At sa loob ng 27 araw ay kakaharapin na natin ang isa sa pinakaimportanleng pagsusulit ng ating buhay. Patuloy nating piling lumaban. Piling magpakahaharap at magsusumikap para mas masarap kapag nakamit ang minimithing ‘sandaan.

**#20Ateam** At kung saan man ang bawat 149 sa ating mapupunta at dadalhin ng ating mga desisyon at inspirasyon, magpasya tayong ipakita palagi ang pinakamahusay na bersyon ng ating sarili ng may puso at pagpapakumbaba.

**No18nean left behind** Lahat tayong mga agila ay sabay sabay na lilipad. At to, 20, 0 30 taon mula ngayon, babalikan natin ang 3 taong nagdaan nang nakangiti at may pagmamalaki bilang matatagumpay na tao na nagtaya para sa sarili, para sa pamilya at para sa bayan.

Maraming salamat at magandang araw sa ating lahat.
This is not just any kind of graduation. This is one giant step closer to earning that coveted MD, and getting your PRC license number as part of the roster of physicians. That is the next challenge. But I am confident that the Ateneo has prepared each of you well. A tip of the hat to the school for achieving a high passing percentage in the board exams last 2017. With that kind of record, I'm confident that all of you here can make it through. So congratulations in advance, mga doktor at doktora.

Congratulations too, to every parent, husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend and partner who celebrates this moment with your beloved graduate. Aside from the financial support, struggling and suffering with your loved ones through every exam, lecture, giant textbook, terror teacher, and toxic duty, is worth it. You just passed an extended course in shared suffering.

Dear graduates, as you stand today, know that you are among the privileged. Medicine is one of the classical professions, with a capital ‘P’. It’s also one of most competitive and most challenging fields in the world. And that you study here, in the Ateneo, one of the best, and aminin na natin, one of the most expensive places of learning in the country, is a mark of your good fortune. Just for a little perspective.

According to 2016 figures from NEDA, 26 million Filipinos are poor, with 12 million living in extreme poverty. Figures from the Department of Education tell us that there are 3.6 million Filipinos who are classified as Out of School Youth, 83% of whom are 16-24 years old. Imagine, how many of those children would have wanted to become doctors? Imagine how much richer the medical field would be if they actually had. So your very presence here is a reality that many of our countrymen & women can only dream about. I know that as we strive to be persons for others that this is something we will always be keenly aware of as we near practice.

I’d like to share two things with you today and I’ll keep things simple and direct. I’d like to talk about the themes of connectedness, and care. I was a Social Science major in college, and part of that field is the idea that the things we study don’t work in isolation. In painting a picture of a society, the social scientist talks to the anthropologist, the psychologist, the lawyer, and the economist among others. The idea is to create as complete a picture of society as possible, to understand it as a whole before choosing a part to play or an arena to serve in. So even as you practice medicine, talk to the engineer, the mathematician, and the janitors, the street children and the maintenance staff. Because when we come to you for help, please remember that we won’t come to your clinic with just our symptoms. We come to you with our fears, our anxieties, our history of wrong decisions, our confusion and our desire to understand what’s happening to our bodies.

As Akbayan Partylist's representative during the 13th and 14th Congress, then-Congresswoman Risa fought for the passage of people-centered legislation like the Cheaper Medicines Law and the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program Extension with Reforms Law (CARPER).
need your help in gathering the courage to prepare and come face to face with loss and death.

Society at large too, needs your connectedness. If we raise the conversation one notch higher, health is one of the aspects of any functioning society that remains important at every stage of development. But very often we can lose sight of the fact that the practice of seeing a patient is the end product of a host of other things and social structures that have been there long before the patient even gets to us.

*Anong ibig kong sabihin?* Society needs your help. Our country needs your help. Figures from the Department of Health say that we have a ratio of one doctor for every 33,000 people. The ratio of mental health professionals to patients stands at one for every 250,000 people according to the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development. And we also confront a serious problem with bed capacity in many of our public hospitals. I’m sure, many of you, as well as your teachers, are all too familiar with this reality. So we will always need doctors, not just to treat ailing individuals, but to help us improve the policies that should give access to better health to the poor, our elderly, the young, and the victims of natural disasters.

We will also always need competent medical research, and even more competent scientific ethics. Dahil ang tindi po talaga ng fake news ngayon, and there is an almost shameless disregard for the facts, for the truth, and for the consequences that willful ignorance can have for other people. I believe it is this school’s mission to create healers who don’t just treat individuals, but also look at the conditions that perpetuate illness and disease, or the broken systems that deny our fellow Filipinos access to vital healthcare, and treat them as well.

So in the words of that Tom Cruise movie with a lot of running close up shots “your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to stay and heal your country.” And no, this message will not self-destruct in five seconds. It will be with you every day.

So whatever road you take after this, whatever field of medicine you choose to specialize in, wherever it is you choose to make your mark, I only ask that you embrace where you are, that you bloom where you are planted, and you never forget where you came from.

Which brings me to my second point, that of care, and what that could mean para sa isang doktor sa panahon ngayon. Being a doctor is a position of prestige, not only because an intimate knowledge of the human body gives you a kind of power over others, but also because people respect that training and skill. And let’s face it, you have a title at the end of your name, a title that will remain with you for the rest of your life unless you breach the medical code of ethics and do something stupid.

But along with that prestige is a unique burden and responsibility. No profession is more invested in the affirmation of life, than yours. And to borrow a few words from U.P. professor Butch Dalisay, we live in a season of slaughter. We live in a time when life has become so cheap and so easily cast aside, no less than by the State itself. It is murder, state sanctioned murder. And in this non-doctor’s humble opinion, to turn a blind eye to it, to support it, is a violation not only of the Bill of Rights, but of the more ancient oath that your profession has upheld for thousands of years, and one that the Ateneo School of Medicine and Public Health has relentlessly committed itself to defending since 2007. We will soon commemorate the murder of Kian de los Santos, who was killed on August 16 of last year, that’s four days from now. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 54 minors have been killed.
by the administration’s War on Drugs. And this government has not apologized. Quite the contrary, it has said that the killings won’t stop.

Three days ago, a Saudi-led air strike hit a school bus in Yemen, killing 29 children, injuring 61 others. An image that still stays with me until now is that of a child of no older than ten, caked in blood from head to foot, still wearing his blue backpack. He couldn’t even cry. He just sat on the hospital bed as nurses tended to him, shaking. The reporter from CNN said that they couldn’t show anymore images because they were too graphic, that body parts were strewn all over the street, and that some corpses just couldn’t be identified anymore. The United Nations has called the war in Yemen the worst humanitarian crisis in modern history.

We need a healing of our memory, the restoration of our compassion, and the affirmation of our humanity, because I think to heal another person is to deny death. To cure the sick and remove disease is to stare death in the face, look her in the eye and say ‘I know you’ll get us all eventually, but you won’t get us today.’ To heal another person is to uphold their being. To heal another is to say ‘I see you. I recognize you, and I will protect you, for as long as I am able.’

Sa Tagalog diba, we have a very beautiful word: “malasakit.” If you add a space to that, one space, it becomes ‘mala sakit’—like pain. To care for something so much, that when the thing or person you care about is in pain, you can’t stop yourself from doing something about it. You care for something or someone so much, that any harm done to him or her is harm done to yourself, and the thought of doing nothing is unbearable. There is no distinction between you and the person you care about, no distance, no space.

My fellow Ateneans, never forget. Never forget that for every patient that walks into your clinic, or that visits you in the hospital, there are thousands who never get that far because they can’t read or write, or afford the nine peso jeep ride to get to you. Never forget that for every life you save as many as seven out of ten poor Filipinos die without ever having seen a doctor.

Never forget that the most vile diseases are ignorance, inequality, and injustice. May your Ignatian flame burn bright, and may the spirit of Magis guide you as you go down from the hill into your practice.

The world needs all the healers it can get.

Mabuhay ang Ateneo! Congratulations to the class of 2018! Mabuhay po tayong lahat!
Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

—MATTHEW II:28

ateneo.edu/alumni/memoriam

August 18, 2017  Jose Alfredo “Joe-Al” L. Villanueva (BSEco ’66, MBA ’70)
January 18, 2018  Benjamin “Ben” S. Bautista (GS ’50, HS ’54, BS Journ ’58)
February 13, 2018  Rev. Moises Mel “Moses” A. Campo Jr. (ABPD ’89)
February 17, 2018  Renato “Rene” E. Nieva (HS ’58, AB Eco ’62)
February 21, 2018  Valentin “Val” A. Araneta (HS ’67, AB Eco ’71)
March 12, 2018  Atty. Justinian “Justin” E. Adviento (HS ’77, AB Eco ’82)
March 13, 2018  Osbert “Osbie” A. Santillan (GS ’68, HS ’72)
April 7, 2018  Renato “Rene” S. Ira (GS ’41, HS ’47, AB ’51, BBA ’52)
April 12, 2018  Arturo R. Perdigon (HS ’56)
May 24, 2018  Rafael Maria B. Puyat (HS 2004)
June 5, 2018  Philip S. Javier III (HS ’85, AB Lit-Fil ’89)
June 6, 2018  Eulogio “Logy” N. Nakpil (GS ’42, HS ’48)
June 2, 2018  Hon. Michael “Mike” V. Farinas (ABSS ’85)
July 2, 2018  Ramon M. Macaraig (MS Chem ’78)
July 10, 2018  Sylvia C. Estella-Chuapeco (AB Psy ’79)
July 26, 2018  Antonio “Tony” C. Abaya (HS ’51, AB Journ ’55)
July 27, 2018  Myra G. Alcid-Gavino (BSBM ’79)
August 7, 2018  Rene A. Molina (GS ’75, HS ’79)
August 7, 2018  Virgilio “Gil” M. Banaria (BSBM ’77, MBA ’81)
August 8, 2018  Jose “Joe” L. Castellano (HS ’57)
August 8, 2018  Jose “Joe” G. Baltazar (HS ’61, MBM ’69)
August 15, 2018  Dion P. Castillo (GS ’54)
August 16, 2018  Eduardo B. Jayme (GS ’60, HS ’64, Col ’68)
September 4, 2018  Noel V. Rodriguez (GS ’76, HS ’80)
September 9, 2018  Fr. Amado S. Cruz, SJ (Col ’63)
September 9, 2018  Judge Guillermo “Panky” P. Agloro (GS ’62, HS ’66)
A Song for Mary

THE ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY GRADUATION HYMN

We stand on a hill between the earth and sky.
Now all is still where Loyola’s colors fly.
Our course is run and the setting sun ends Ateneo’s day.
Eyes are dry at the last goodbye; this is the Ateneo way.

Mary for you! For your white and blue!
We pray you’ll keep us, Mary, constantly true!
We pray you’ll keep us, Mary, faithful to you!

Down from the hill, down to the world go I;
rememb’ring still, how the bright Blue Eagles fly.
Through joys and tears, through the laughing years,
we sing our battle song:
Win or lose, it’s the school we choose;
this is the place where we belong!

Mary for you! For your white and blue!
We pray you’ll keep us, Mary, constantly true!
We pray you’ll keep us, Mary, faithful to you!

words by Fr James B Reuter SJ
music adapted by Colonel José Campaña
from Calixa Lavallée’s “O Canada”