

Prize presentation 28/6/2017 (Crown of Thorns)

Let me start by congratulating all awardees today. Your hard work has paid off. Let me also congratulate athletes as well as participants of all competitions this year, whether you have won anything or not, for having gained and learnt from the experience in the process.

May I express my gratitude to teachers, coaches, trainers for supporting you and your teammates for supporting each other. Thanks are also due to your opponents because their serious attempts to defeat you have brought out the best in your potentials and developed your skills and resilience!

This is a very fruitful year for the school indeed! In some events, we have recovered what we have painfully lost in the previous years. For a few others, we have made historic achievements. And overall, we have done rather well, despite serious challenges. Great job, gentlemen!

It is customary to say that we should not be complacent with our achievements today. So, what is our next goal?

Going beyond (超越) what we have achieved this year and gain even more prizes next year?

I would surely not mind it if you are doing it without sacrificing the other things that are also valuable to your education and growth. However, I would like you to seriously think about what “going beyond” (超越) really means in terms of the Jesuit vision of education at Wah Yan.

While schools with long traditions like us all treasure holistic development of our talents, such as sports, music, etc., different schools have different cultures, values and visions. And because of this, the meaning of “Going beyond” (超越) may differ, even if they seem to have similar histories and backgrounds. And it is important that we Wahyanites reflect seriously on this. Otherwise, we will lose ourselves in the midst of mindless competition as we try to compare ourselves with other schools using other people's

yardsticks. Yes, we may enjoy similar reputation among the public, but we have our own values and characters.

For me, a distinguishing feature of Jesuit education is the emphasis on reflection. And through cultivating in you the habit of reflection, we don't just seek to develop you from boys to men, but gentlemen, and not just gentlemen, but thoughtful gentlemen with depth (修養, 深度, 內涵). *We may not be there yet, but this is the direction we should be heading.*

With this aspiration, what should “going beyond” (超越) mean in terms of competition and awards for Wahyanites?

Today, we have given out a lot of accolades, prizes and awards.

These are well deserved recognition for your hard work, and for those who have helped you make this possible. No one should take this recognition away.

However, when we talk about “going beyond” and consider it along with the deeper meaning of our Wah Yan education, then I want you to walk away today with another accolade in mind, a different sort of award:



— The crown of thorns that was put on Jesus' head before his crucifixion.

When Jesus was on trial for his life, the soldiers twisted thorns into a makeshift crown and jammed it on his head. They hung a purple robe on him and ridiculed him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews," while they punched him and kicked him. The Gospels included this as a significant part of Jesus' trial. This is hardly a moment of triumph and joy, unlike the real coronation of a king or presentation of awards to winners. Instead, this is an instant of rejection, ridicule/mockery, suffering. So when we look at this very different sort of "honor" in today's prize presentation ceremony, what reflection would it trigger in us?



www.DrawingsOfJesus.com

artist: Julio Molina-Muscara

So what light does the crown of thorns shed on you?

Perhaps these:

Firstly, Jesus went through suffering and death before his triumphant resurrection. The suffering and death are essential parts of the salvation story. This reminds us that to achieve anything that is of significance; pain and struggles are necessary parts of the process. The hard training you have gone through, the defeats you have suffered – they all contribute to your ultimate success, and they make your achievements more meaningful.

Secondly (and more importantly if we are in victory), remember that the crown of thorns is more about mockery / ridicule / shame than pain. It reminds us about humility. While we need not belittle ourselves, we should also avoid deluding ourselves as being greater than we really are and forgetting to be grateful for the help we have received – including innate talents we are born with.

Going a step further, we should reflect on the true meaning of honor and glory and how they are related to humility. If we know what was really happening in Jesus' crucifixion, then we will realize that all these mockery, ridicule and shame that Jesus endured was

actually a noble and holy act. So, what on the outside may seem bright, glorious, praiseworthy may in fact be empty vanity. On the other hand, sometimes, that which is humble, lowly and even despicable may in fact be precious and noble. This gets us to pause and reflect on the relationship between worldly standards and values that go beyond such worldly standards.

Finally, remember Jesus wore the crown of thorns not for himself, but for us. The humiliation he suffered is not necessary if not for his willingness to taste death in our place so that we can gain eternal life. This crown of thorns is then ultimately a symbol of love. What does this imply about "going beyond" winning? It means that after all the competitions, which are no doubt great ways to bring out our God-given potentials, we should move beyond it and see all opponents as brothers and sisters, united in love. They are not enemies.

I am not at all sure whether my interpretation about the crown of thorns conforms to church teachings. All I know is that while people normally erect monuments to depict moments of victory, Christians choose to put up the symbol of the cross on which Jesus was nailed – thus depicting a moment of humiliation, defeat and suffering. This symbol must have deep meaning for Christians. So if we seek to “go beyond” (超越) where we are now, then as we enjoy the sweetness of victory and honor, let us also spare a moment to ponder on the meaning of this seemingly paradoxical symbol of defeat and humiliation. And if we do find inspiration from this, then we may realize that this experience of attempting to “go beyond” is “transcendental”!

Thank you.