

Address at the 60th Anniversary of Marist Education at Lavalla Catholic College, Traralgon

9th September 2016

Today we are especially conscious that we are all part of a story. There have been quite a few chapters to this story – those of the Marist Fathers, the Brigidine Sisters, the Presentation Sisters, and the Marist Brothers; chapters that have seen what we now know as Lavalla Catholic College be called by different names – St Paul’s, Kildare, Lourdes, Presentation, Catholic Regional. It’s been a story of different campuses, various configurations, of expansion and re-positioning. You will find its markers in foundation stones and blessing plaques, in honour boards and building names, in photos on walls and names on trophies.

It’s a great story, a story of small beginnings but huge generosity, a story of imaginative vision and day-in/day-out commitment, a story that has had its moments of immense joy and success, and a story that has had other times of sadness and even shame. It’s a human story, yet one which we tell with enormous fondness. It’s our story.

Each of us here this morning has written part of that story and we all have been characters in it. Some, like me, have had tiny cameo roles; others have been the great characters, the heroes and heroines; some have added colour; others have given richness and depth. All have played their part, and most here today continue to do so.

But, by and large, stories such as that of Lavalla are written in small sentences. We are usually not even aware that a story is being written. We just go about our day to day work – as teacher, as student, as principal, as chaplain, as counsellor, as groundsman, as receptionist, as student leader, as football or netball player, as choir member, whatever – in ordinary ways: preparing today’s lessons; doing this week’s assessments; playing this game; showing up at that rehearsal; attending this or that meeting. It is through the multitude of these ordinary little sentences that, together and over time, we write something that is genuinely extraordinary.

It is a story, of course, that stretches a lot longer than sixty years. In what today we might describe as its prequel, it is a story that goes back to nineteenth and eighteenth century Ireland and France, to Nano Nagle and Daniel Delaney, Jean-Claude Colin and Marcellin Champagnat – and their inspired efforts to bring a quality Catholic education to young women and men who would otherwise have been denied it.

One hundred and forty years after Saint Marcellin started the world’s first Marist school in the French town of La Valla, it was that spirit and that hope that came to be brought here to the Latrobe Valley. It was founded on the conviction that all young people, whatever their circumstances, were entitled to the same educational and evangelising opportunities. And what a wonderful success that has been here: what a proud record of achievement that has seen graduates of this College pursue their careers and their lives both far and near, and make a difference for good in this world.

It is also a story that has its most compelling chapters yet to be written. Today, it is Marist Schools Australia and the Marist Association of St Marcellin Champagnat who are responsible for leading the College, so ensuring that the Diocese of Sale and the community of Lavalla can have a fine Catholic school here. There is a new generation of Marists as educators. They have new technologies, new approaches to learning, enhanced approaches to pastoral care, and strategic plans for improvements and growth. And it is the youngest among these to whom responsibility for writing the future will be entrusted. What will you create? What can you imagine?

Finally, let us be deeply aware that the story of Lavalla – its past, its present and its future – is always an expression of a deeper story, a timeless story, the greatest story of all: the story of Jesus. In this story there is ultimately only one story-line that matters – that of love, of a God who is love. That's the story we're all trying to tell today, the one that those who went before us tried to tell, and that those who come after us will always try to tell. That is the story of Lavalla Catholic College at its noblest and truest.

On behalf of the two hundred Marist Brothers around Australia, the more than six hundred members of the Marist Association, and the family fifty-four Marist school communities that make up Marist Schools Australia, I am delighted to wish Lavalla Catholic College a happy sixtieth anniversary.

Br Michael Green