

AMSSA Morning Prayer 9<sup>th</sup> of August – Yr 11 Students, Monte sant' Angelo Mercy College

**Lauren:**

Good morning to everyone and welcome to day two of the AMSSA conference. My name is Lauren and this is Rebecca and Annie and we have been given the platform and opportunity to commence your day. We hope to provide you with insight and our student voices, some different perspectives, some storytelling, and some reflecting. Let us begin in the name of the.....

To start, here is a passage from John O'Donohue's *To Bless the Space Between Us*

*We give thanks for arriving safely in a new dawn,  
For the gift of eyes to see the world,  
The gift of mind to feel at home in my life.  
The waves of possibility breaking on the shore of dawn,  
The harvest of the past that awaits my hunger,  
And all the furtherings this new day will bring.*

**Rebecca:**

We deeply honour and pay our respects to the land on which we are gathered on today, the land of the Cammeraygal people of the Ku-Ring-Gai nation, whose land we gather on today. We honour all Aboriginal elders past, present and future, and we thank all Aboriginal people for caring for this beautiful and sacred land.

I watched a documentary last week, and the narrator, Bob Randall, a Mutujulu Elder, said something that I wish to share with you. He said in terms of the idea of home, that "the ceiling is the stars at night" and "the boundary is the horizon." I want to instill in your day this spirituality, this sense of the perfection, beauty and power of nature. That if your land is your family, then in your country you will never feel lonely. I want to offer another perspective to you, that in our busy city lives we cannot experience: the stillness of the land. The silence. The silence that is wondrous and powerful, ever-changing yet unchanging. I want to suggest that if we can learn to speak this silence; to speak of the innate beauty found in all humanity; if we can forget about all the too-complex-to-understand human constructs that divide people from people and people from land; that divide people from themselves; if the ceiling is the stars at night and the boundary is the horizon, then our speech- our communication- will come from our hearts.

Now in terms of speaking out: I find it hard to not mention what Bob Randall said in the film about the current state of his community. Stuck between two worlds in poverty: their irreversibly corrupted culture and the Australia as we know, which his community do not have the education to understand. The children see sickness in their people and in their land, and then in themselves: so they find their way out- and spiritually they have died already. My heart breaks. I will have the opportunity to visit this community soon and I cannot wait to learn about their culture.

I love learning, and I have discovered this year that I find meaning in people. People fascinate me, and I want to use my education to help other people. I want to be a doctor. Just quickly before I pass onto Annie, I'd like to tell you a quick story from a couple of years ago while I was on holiday with my family up at Nambucca heads. I was having fun splashing around, when an Aboriginal girl came up to me, told me her name was Eshanti, and asked me if I wanted to swim over to the sand dunes with her. I was shocked and awed by her friendliness, and in the space of an hour she told me how her dad had died in a car accident, she and her mum were in the car, and her dad had been drinking. Of her mum who

had lung cancer, and of her older sibling who she lived with sometimes. I was 13 and completely out of my depth, but what struck me then, and still does now, was her vibrancy and how life just bloomed from her, and I dearly hope that she doesn't lose this as she grows, because she has a truly incredible voice and an ability to speak like no one else I have come across.

## **Annie**

I would like to say that I know what to say, that I have to contain the flow of words, and especially being at monte where you reflect on your reflections, one would expect this to be the case. However, I have thought about it, a lot. However, I have never had to articulate reflection on something as extensive and thought provoking as freedom. And as a side note; I'm not entirely sure if the meaning of freedom can be expressed in any language.

I was going to reflect a quote from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet on Freedom*. His work is pretty extraordinary, well known and absolutely perfect for this speech. But, Well I won't be taking the smart road and instead I have to decided to turn to an author who I connect with on a more personal level

Neel Shusterman. A young adult author and writer of the arc of *A Scythe Trilogy*. Which myself a non-book worm kind of person absolutely love. Its set in the future... Yes another dystopian novel... But instead of a president or prime minister, the whole of earth's population is controlled and guided by 'the thunderhead, an AI, designed by humans for humans. It is generous and kind but most of all understanding.

At the start of every chapter, there is a paragraph on what the thundered it thinking but cannot communicate to any real person as it does not wish to frighten them. It is in one of these paragraphs that something Shusterman has said has stuck with me for years since i read it, and I feel relates very strongly with speaking the silence.

"While freedom gives rise to growth and enlightenment, permission allows evil to flourish in a light of day that would otherwise destroy it. A self-important dictator gives permission for his subjects to blame the world's ills on those least able to defend themselves. A haughty queen gives permission to slaughter in the name of God. An arrogant head of state gives permission to all nature of hate as long as it feeds his ambition. And the unfortunate truth is, people devour it. Society gorges itself, and rots. Permission is the bloated corpse of freedom."

Choosing to ignore the worlds greater issues, whether it is for denial or sadness, is permission. Permission for those committing crimes against humanity to continue what that they are doing, allowing those without a voice to continue without a voice.

Those of us in positions of freedom with education on our side, it is up to us to disagree with silence. To educate and empower others to join the advance to freedom for all. And it is in mercy communities that we have this freedom. We have that compassion, the education, we have the guts.

Someone has to break the silence. Don't be chicken. There's no reason it can't be you.

## Lauren:

I must admit I did feel overwhelmed with ideas that somehow, I couldn't articulate, possibly in fear of others disagreeing or making a fool of myself. For all its worth I am not an official senior leader, I didn't even apply to have a position so I did feel ill-equipped and unworthy to contribute to such sophisticated topics. But I came to the realisation that I represent the majority of students. The majority who are voluntarily unrecognised. Perhaps my role here is to speak the silence for those who feel out of place amongst this more traditional environment.

As a student who, I guess identifies to be more fluid in my spirituality and progressive in my values, I have only felt confident with my views when my I was encouraged to embrace them this year in Studies of Religion.

I feel modernising how we communicate with students can be harmoniously integrated into keeping the important tradition of Mercy which I do appreciate clearly drives the actions everyone here. I do hope that every delegate here feels as if they encourage spiritual curiosity and freedom within their workplace.

My contribution is, if we all want to continue to thrive and sustain in a changing world, we must modernise and contextualise these Mercy values in a relevant way. You cannot teach us these values through rote learning. The cry of Mercy I see promoted within the logo should also represent the cry of diversity, sparking more conversations about the differences between us, opening us to the world that is outside our view. Movement towards interacting with every student in a personalised way encourages motivation and enthusiasm, providing us with the foundation to go forward with confidence to aid in resolving disparities and pressing social situations.

To conclude, as much as you might be met with resistance, please insist more students like us three, are offered the platform to contribute. Without Ms. Torpy coming to us, really without an option, I would not have noticed myself feeling as if, *hey I matter-my view matters*.

As a final few words, here is a poem from the book *Where the Sidewalk Ends*, by Shel Silverstein

*If you are a dreamer, come in.  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer . . .  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,  
For we have some flax golden tales to spin.  
Come in!  
Come in!*

We ask that we further investigate and receive guidance from the actions of Catherine McAuley, we conclude in the name of the father.....

