Schola Brevis

March 13, 2023

Good morning,

I want to get right to the point of my words to you and speak directly to our students but what I will say applies to all of us. I want to stress the urgency of putting an end to racist and demeaning speech and behavior at Marist. Last fall, each of you stood before your peers and pledged to uphold Marist School's honor code when you recited these words, "I pledge to conduct myself honorably, to uphold and promote personal integrity, and to respect others. I will not lie, cheat, or steal."

I am always pleased when our students are accepted into one of our military academies. Each academy has an honor code. Listen to the Cadet Honor Code at West Point: "A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, *or tolerate those who do*." Here is a description of how the Honor Code can be violated: "To have violated the honor code, a Cadet must have lied, cheated, stolen, or attempted to do so, *or tolerated such action on the part of another Cadet*." Tolerated here means not reporting the violation to a proper authority.

We should consider adding that kind of language to our honor code. Why? Many of us are familiar with these words, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." Those of you who have traveled on the Bearing Witness Trip, visited the Dr. Martin Luther King Center here in Atlanta, or traveled to the Legacy Museum in Birmingham, Alabama, have seen what can happen when good people do nothing and evil goes unchecked.

When good people at Marist remain silent and look the other way while students use racial slurs or demean students in other ways, including pressuring students to do what they know is wrong, they violate the honor code. The actions I just described bring dishonor to those who perform them and to those who tolerate that behavior by doing nothing.

Marist students who use racial slurs or demean students in other ways, including pressuring students to do what they know is wrong, can no longer assume that their classmates who witness that behavior will not intervene or report it to the proper authorities. Racial slurs and behaviors that demean other students are not to be hidden and unknown but must be revealed and made known so that they can be corrected and stopped. That will prevent other students from suffering the pain and the humiliation those words or behaviors inflict. Students who use racist speech or in any way degrade the dignity of other students are reminded that the penalty will be stiff and could include not remaining at Marist.

Those cruel words and behaviors tell the recipients of them that they are inferior because of the color of their skin and that is a lie. The advantages you enjoy because of the circumstances of your birth do not entitle you to belittle the achievements of students whose circumstances differ from yours. Those advantages are to be received as gifts meant to serve God's purposes. To take and use them in ways other than what God intends is stealing. To intimidate other students not to say anything lest you pay the consequences of your actions is cheating.

Using racial slurs or demeaning students is to use power to dominate, manipulate, dehumanize, and otherwise exploit another human being for one's benefit. This misuse of power was abhorrent to Fr. Colin and is what he meant when he said Marists should say a resounding NO to this abuse of power, along with pride and greed.

When racist speech is used, it is usually not the first time. Those words have likely been spoken in other contexts or repeatedly in one's mind. That means the sentiments those words express have found a home in one's heart. People engage in hate speech because they like how it makes them feel, superior and all-powerful. They like feeling that way, even if it comes at the expense of demeaning the dignity of another human being.

Each one of us, without exception, has been given two powers: the power to love and the power to hate. There will be times when you will be tempted to use the power to hate. When those moments come, remember you pledged to conduct yourselves honorably, to uphold and promote personal integrity, and respect others. You pledged you would not lie, cheat or steal.

You gave your word.

Now keep it.

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.