

SHS Commencement Exercises AY 2020-2021
Speech of Concession

There is news that is currently gripping the world's attention. It is not about COVID19, not about variants mutating and being discovered; it is not about vaccines. It is not about politics, nor ideologies of right-leaning populist strong men and left-tagged progressives, liberals, socialists, communists.

It is about a herd of wild Asian elephants, wandering hundreds of miles away from their natural habitat, trekking across main land China, heading northward. The big and puzzling question is WHY? *Naglalayas ba sila? Nawawala? O Nagwawala? Umuuwi? May hinahanap ba sila? Ano? Saan? Bakit?* The story of these wandering elephants may well be the metaphor of human life in the world of today. *Ang kwento ng mga elepanteng naglalakbay ay talinhaga ng buhay ng tao sa mundo ngayon.*

Of course, the undeniable context is this pandemic which continues to inflict us, afflict us, affect us in so many different ways – how we work, how we stay at home, how we teach and learn, how we rest and recreate and procreate, (in this NCAA 96) how we play and compete, how we celebrate victories, how we accept defeats, how we defend our crown and become champions again, how we pray and attend church, how we conduct commencement exercises, how we stay healthy, how we combat disease, how we cope with death, how we shall elect our leaders and change the future of our country; now we may add, how does this story of the elephants conclude, what will they find, how will they find it... so many how's, so many why's, so many questions...

But schools, like Letran, are safe spaces for questions. We live and breathe and move by them, we encourage them, we thrive and teach and learn because of questions. The word *question* has its roots from the Latin verb *quaerere*, which means, “to seek, examine, investigate; to doubt, interrogate.” Such is the primary industry of educational institutions; it is our reason for being. We ask questions and seek answers and find more questions. We grow by our truth-seeking, our truth-telling, our truth-testing, our truth-transforming.

Questions are also integral to our spirituality. Faith is a kind of seeking as much as it is a kind of seeing. *Sa pananampalataya, naghahanap tayo hanggang sa makita natin ang hinahanap.* Theology, Christian Living, Religious Education, which are fundamental and favorite courses here in Letran, take the definition of St. Anselm, *fides quaerens intellectum* – “faith seeking understanding.” A faith that questions, a faith that doubts, leads to an increase in faith.

And in the process of the question, we stumble upon errors and mistakes, upon sins and shortcomings, upon losing ourselves and losing our way. One of the most relatable images in the Bible is the LOST SHEEP. In our life as Christians, we have been lost – *naligaw, nawala, nagwawala, nawalay, nalihis ng landas*. But the story does not end with “and they remained lost forever.” No. That would be sad and tragic and regretful. The story of loss is resolved by the story of finding. And it is the Good Shepherd who seeks and finds what was lost. The Parable is not anymore about the Lost Sheep, but about the Found Sheep. God finds us. And there will be so much joy in heaven!

So, we may see ourselves as comparable to the wandering elephants, inexplicably, mysteriously seeking and searching for some thing, some place, some one. Yet, our story, our journey, our pilgrimage as Letranites, as Christians, as People of God, culminates not in eternal loss, but in hopeful, joyful finding.

As our SHS students graduate and move up to higher learning, we pray that the seeds of seeking, the art and science and spirituality of the question be the fundamental value imparted upon you by our Alma Mater. And when you stumble and fall, when you fail, when you get lost... in the Arriba Spirit, GET UP, LOOK UP, HOLD ON to GOD.

*It's OK. It's OK. It's OK. It's OK.
If you're lost, we're all a little lost.
And it's all right.*

It is OK to be NOT OK. You will be OK. You will be found. You are not elephants; You are Letranites. It's all going to be all right.

So, now, as your rector and president, I concede to you the title of GRADUATES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL OF COLEGIO DE SAN JUAN DE LETRAN, AY 2020-2021!