

*“Lucere et Ardere”*

To shine and burn. To enlighten with knowledge and enliven with faith.

I obviously still don't know how to pronounce the Latin but I remember reading this saying four years ago as I first walked through the Aquinas gates and thinking I really wonder what that means. And halfway through my first year I reckon I even Google translated it. Now after four years of living at Aquinas I have realised that this Latin saying written on the front gate that I have walked past multiple times (after barely making it up the unnecessarily steep hill that isn't overly fun after a full day of uni) really does summarise the culture of Aquinas.

To enlighten with knowledge...

I guess that this is the part I am meant to talk about all the knowledge that I have gained through my studies at university and how I learnt professional skills such as communication, time management, how to perform under pressure and how to prioritise. Whilst I have learnt those things (although some are less prominent than others – for example the fact that I wrote this speech at 9am this morning probably suggests the time management skill could use some sharpening). College teaches you a whole different skillset. It teaches you how to be around people, the knowledge and ideas that you gain from the wealth of people that surround you.

College teaches you resilience, in the face of defeat to work harder to ensure that the victories outweigh the defeats. Not always possible but fortunately in 2 of my 4 years we have successfully won HTC, memories that I will always hold onto. For everyone returning next year I hope that you are able to use the pain of missing out on winning HTC this year and turn it into motivation to bring the cup back up to the top of the hill where it belongs.

College teaches you that prioritising your time and energy is not a good work ethic but a necessity of life. Over time at college you begin to learn what is important to you and what needs to give in order for you to achieve your goals. College also teaches you that not everyone is going to appreciate your priorities and that everyone's priorities are different but should still be respected.

But in my eyes, the most important thing that the last four years has taught me is about change. Yes, change in a personal sense but also change on a wider sense. I don't think anyone who has been involved in Aquinas over the last four years would argue that the college hasn't changed significantly in that time. In a personal sense, I think many people who didn't know first year me would struggle to believe that the nervous non-drinking 18 year old confused as to why he now had two cans of coke duct-taped to his hands and overwhelmed by his first day at college would go onto be “Aquian of the Year” the following year, Senior HC the year after that and Valete from college after four years. And yes, I am still very much so confused and overwhelmed by college. The take away is that Aquinas is such a strong vehicle for change and it may sound cliché and overly promotional,

but I truly do believe Aquinas has made me the capable human being that I am today, on the doorstep of my professional career.

I think that nothing emphasises change quite like the fact that there are only 4 students that have been here for the better part of the last four years. To Eliza, Nat and Matt – the only remaining students of the 2015 Fresher cohort thank you for the impact you have had on Aquinas and myself over these four years and I wish you all the best for the future, but I know you will go on to do amazing things.

I'd like to quickly thank some of the people who have made my time at Aquinas College possible and who have helped me come to love this place I have called home for the last 4 years.

My parents – the support that the two of you have given me has been amazing and I don't think I can truly put into words how appreciative I am of that.

To the staff of Aquinas past and present – from Br John and Br Paul, obviously not here but without whom I wouldn't have been an Aquinian as they accepted my application, to Br Michael and Br Mark, to Carolyn and all your support especially over the last two years, to Mark and all the other chefs for over a hundred Fish Fridays and all the other food, to Mark Price and the maintenance men – for the hundreds of maintenance requests they've helped me with – Mark still gets nervous every time I go to talk to him as he associates me with work to be done.

To every Aquinian I have been fortunate enough to live with over this last four years (past and present), thank you for the impact you have had on my life – whether that be in a big way or in a small way through a pleasant conversation at dinner or a passing smile. Now to wrap up, I'd like to wish the 2019 Student Leaders all the best with next year. To all other continuing Aquinians, I wish you all the best especially in HTC.

To my fellow Valetants – I wish you all the best in pursuing your careers and believe that you will all make a massive impact on the wider world.

*“Lucere et adere”*

Shine and burn in every day and every opportunity.

Thank you.

Matt Smith