

Valetants of 2018, men and women of Aquinas, ladies and gentlemen.

In this digital age of SMS, WhatsApp and Snapchat, we do murderous things with language, with words, words laden with meaning and history that have taken centuries to evolve. Acronyms and abbreviations – and we all use them – can just suck out all the richness and beauty and nuance from linguistic expression. It's especially regrettable for us who speak English, a language which has two or three times more words than any other on earth. It's a regression really.

I am not aware, however, that anyone has come up with a shorthand version of the wonderful word that is the centrepiece of tonight – the Latin word *valete*. Mitch Thompson – who has happily begun a study of Latin this year – would be able to tell us what it means. I won't put him on the spot, but I'm sure that if I did he would tell us that it is the second person imperative plural of the verb *valere*.

And he may also be able to tell us that the word carries a twin meaning. It has sense of just saying 'goodbye' – *vale* for one person, *valete* for more than one. We *are* doing that here, of course. Tonight, we take our leave of one another, and particularly of this year's six Valetants – five who are here with their parents this evening, and also Sean whom we farewelled with his mother last Monday. *Valere* means that, at one level, to say goodbye. Inevitably, there's a sadness in that.

But that's not its primary meaning. It also means to honour, to be of worth, to be inwardly strong, to have integrity, to be someone of conviction and principle. We get the English word 'value' from 'valere', and valour, and valuable and validate. If we touch into those meanings, I think we come closer to our purposes this evening. Yes, we are saying goodbye, but we are saying and wishing much, much more than that.

In saying *valete* to Matt, and Amy, and Sam, and Gemma and Matt, we are, in the first place, validating who they are. We, all of us as a college, are saying to them: you are someone, you are someone of inestimable value. We wish to honour you. We wish to honour who you have been for us, and with us, during the years that you have completed your tertiary studies here at Aquinas. We are saying to each of you: we validate who you have become here, who you have grown to be here. And I think that it's a measure of Aquinas that you flowered into five quite different people. To be an Aquinian is not to be someone of a pre-cast, uniform mould. It is to be yourself, your best self.

And secondly, in saying *valete* to you, we are saying: stay well, be strong, be courageous, be all who you can be, be you. Because you are worthwhile. You are immeasurably worthwhile.

'Valediction' means that – literally to 'speak of value'. Let me read part of the citation that our Valetants will receive from the College – that is, from all of us – later this evening: This to affirm that Matthew, Amy, Gemma, Sam, Matt has this day been honoured at a Valet Ceremony, to leave Aquinas College with its approbation and commendation, and has been awarded this Certification of Valediction, having been a valued member of this College while completing studies for the awarding of – then the name of the degree or diploma.

So, let's really plumb the meaning of this wonderful word that gives a title to this evening's function.

Go well Valetants of 2018, go with God, go assured of our belief in you, of our hopes for you, and of our love for you. Do yourselves proud, and as you do so, you will in turn be validating all of us, and validating Aquinas College.

From all of Aquinas, *Valete* Matt, Amy, Sam, Gemma and Matt!