

***Honourable Justice Pankaj Mithal, Judge Supreme Court of
India***

Annual day Chief Guest Speech at St. Mary's Academy

NOVEMBER 04, 2023

1. Most Rev. Bro. Jerome Ellens – today's guest of honour. Rev Bro S. Edward Sebastian, Principal St. Mary's Academy, my esteemed Teachers, parents, staff, members of the audience, and dear students – the future of India, Bharat Bhagya Vidhata, my dear classmates and friends who are very close to my heart.
2. It gives me great pleasure to be back at home, on the soil of my alma mater after almost four and a half decades. For years I stood here as an ordinary pupil but today you have made me special. I thank each one of you for honoring me and giving this privilege to be here amidst you.
3. I stand before you not as a Judge of the Supreme Court but as a student of the St Mary's Academy. I really owe this school not only my education but also the moral values and

the discipline it inculcated in me as a student. I owe my existence and advancement in life to my alma mater.

4. The biggest lesson that I learnt from this school is respect to my teachers and to discipline myself, i.e. self-discipline. Discipline whether it is self-discipline, institutional discipline or discipline of life, is the foundation of knowledge.
5. During my carefree days in school, I did not even know what I would be doing in life after schooling. There were hardly any choices or options in those days and people generally adopted the vocation of their family or most of them used to join Indian Army and very few used to go in the medical line or engineering services. I decided to be a lawyer as my father was one. Life slowly shaped my career and ultimately perched me as a Judge of the Apex Court. The entire credit goes to my alma mater. I am proud to be part of St Mary's Academy. The time I spent in school were the golden days of my life and I cannot forget my childhood.
6. I quote famous Hindi poet Shubhdra Kumari Chouhan -

“बार-बार आती है मुझको मधुर याद बचपन तेरी।

गया ले गया तू जीवन की सबसे मस्त खुशी मेरी॥

चिंता-रहित खेलना-खाना वह फिरना निर्भय स्वच्छंद।

कैसे भूला जा सकता है बचपन का अतुलित आनंद”?

6A. When I applied for admission to the school, Mrs. Fenthom took the test for admission and I was happy to be selected. I joined the school in class 1st, My class teacher used to be Mrs. Philips. My schoolmates & classmates may correct me if I am wrong. I passed out in 1979. I was in school for 12 years and have very fond memories. I can recollect the names of some my class teachers, Mrs. Jacob, Mrs. Pandya, Mrs. Lang, Mrs. Talwar, Mrs. Rogers, Bro. Vincent, etc. Me and my classmates have wonderful memories of some of our great teachers Mrs. Bhatnager, Mr. Roy, Mr. R.P. Singh, Mr. S.R Singh, Mr. J. Singh, Mr. Tyagi, Mr. Chaturvedi, Mr. Sharma, Mr. Sehgal and last but not the least Mr. Yadav who was the most adorable of all. My fellow classmates would agree with me about the important role played by Bro. Vincent, Bro. Gannon, Bro. Ritchie and Bro. Berchmen in imparting knowledge to us and shaping our life. We also distinctly remember the school staff starting from Mr. Joseph in the

accounts section, Lab Asstt. Subhan & Shyamlal and the Panditji, the canteen owner, who use to provide us bun-samosa which is a delicacy for every *Marian* even today. Chunmun the caretaker of the cycle stand was another person with whom we all were well acquainted, so was he with everyone of us.

7. I was an average student. Sometimes I use to perform well and at times poorly. My report cards from class 1 to class 12 which I still possess, stands testimony of my educational journey. I cherish those report cards and keep them secure as valuable 'collections' of my life.

8. Keeping aside Bro Gannon, Mrs. Bhatnagar & Mr. Yadav in one bracket, my favorite teacher was Mr. Roy, our drawing teacher. I was fond of drawing and painting and was quite good at it. Mr. Roy pampered me by awarding "very good" or "excellent" whenever I used to draw and paint. He ensured that I participate in every drawing and art competition which were very frequent in Meerut in those days. I can say with pride that I have won one or other prize on each and every competition of the clubs that used to organize the

drawing and painting competition in the district. I even represented the school in All India Lal Bahadur Shastri Drawing and Painting competition and was awarded the first prize, a silver medal which is again a valuable collection for me.

9. The practice of having four houses viz '*Gandhi*', '*Nehru*', '*Shastri*' and '*Tagore*' for inter-house competition was started during our time. I was put in 'Shastri House' and my classmate and friend Ajay Singh was the captain of 'Shastri House'. Mani Mohan Nehru was the captain of 'Gandhi House', Mark Pwch of 'Nehru House' and Sanjeev Handa of 'Tagore House'.
10. After leaving school, I realised that there are three distinct features of this school which makes it tall to stand from any other school in the country. The first is the morning assembly session, where all the students use to stand in rows class-wise. The head boy of the school conducts the assembly in the presence of the principal and other teachers. The most distinguished feature of the assembly used to be the 'Pledge' to the nation

“India is my country and all Indians are my brothers and sisters.

I love my country and I am proud of its rich and varied heritage.

I shall always strive to be worthy of it.

I shall give my parents, teachers and all elders respect and treat everyone with courtesy.

To my country and my people, I pledge my devotion. In their well-being and prosperity alone lies my happiness.”

I do not think that students in most of the other schools are made to take such a pledge towards the nation. Pledge towards nation should be made compulsory and all school text books should contain this pledge on its very first page.

11. Then we use to have morning prayers in every classroom.

I distinctly remember one of them even today.

“Our Father, Thou art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against

us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

This prayer is in ethos with the Indian culture and traditions which practice again probably is not adopted and followed by other schools.

12. The second distinguishing feature of the school was the daily games and the annual sports. Almost all the students use to be in the field every evening by 05.00 O'clock either to play hockey, football, basketball, baseball, table tennis and some of them played even tennis. Most of our teachers were also used to be on the playground and played with us and boosted our morale. I do not find this kind of outdoor activity any more in many of the schools.

13. During the annual sports, three events in particular i.e., march pass, tug of war and cycling use to be the most thrilling. It was followed by the prize distribution.

14. The third remarkable feature of the school was the moral science classes. The half an hour moral science class, every day for every class was a path breaking. It was here that we were taught about civic sense, morality, honesty etiquettes,

behavior etc. This was essential for value-based education which probably is lacking today.

15. Mr. Sharma was our beloved Sanskrit teacher. He was quite benevolent and never failed any student. One of the typical questions he used to put in every examination paper was to write a Sanskrit shloka which you may have memorised. I took advantage of this situation and learnt and memorized, only one Sanskrit shloka which I used to write in every examination

गजाननं भूतगणादि सेवितं

कपित्थ जम्बूफलचारु भक्षिणम्

उमासुतं शोक विनाशकारणं

नमामि विघ्नेश्वर पादपङ्कजम् ॥

At this juncture of life, I realize the mistake I committed by not taking Sanskrit seriously as a subject. I find it difficult to read the Vedic literature and our religious scriptures that are in Sanskrit and repent not learning Sanskrit properly at the right time.

16. Speaking in my own alma mater is not just a matter of pride, but also a matter of fulfillment and satisfaction. For more than Seven decades the institution has stood the test of time and true to its moto "***Rectis Corde Latitia***" meaning "***Joy to the upright of the heart***". In a time when Educational institutions are becoming a means of business marking the shift from our long and rooted culture of "Gurukul" or Educational institutes as a sacred place, I am proud to say that my alma mater is still the harbinger of values, and morals that shapes an individual to face the world beyond its walls. (maybe add any personal anecdote of any teacher who was inspiring).

17. To Speak on the Annual day with you all is also an occasion to speak to the young future minds who will be shaping the future of the nation and the world. One of the authors Mitch Albom said "***So many people walk around with a meaningless life. They seem half-asleep, even when they're busy doing things they think are important. This is because they've been chasing the wrong things. The way you get meaning in your life is***

to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.”

18. Dear Students, this statement throw light on how in order to achieve happiness and satisfaction, we must devote ourselves to the greater cause. In my belief there is life beyond textbooks. Think, meditate, enjoy music, develop some hobbies and make the world a happy and better place for the greater cause of humanity. I would say “die for the values and your principles and live for others”.
19. We have to make humans and not robots. Such devices are only to help the humans to work. We should not be slave of them. When I was in school there was less technologies. Time has changed and technology has overpowered everything. Undoubtedly the introduction of technology has eased our life, but the expansion of technology and its growing impact on young minds is a serious threat to a simple and satisfying life.

20. Research in the United States shows that the use of technology by the adolescent has caused social and behavioral problems, reduced attention span and concentration¹.
21. Therefore, dear students use the The “Goldilocks Effect” while using technologies. Moderate engagement in online and digital activities is beneficial in terms of subjective mental well-being and adolescent’s connectedness, whereas too much or too little might prove detrimental².
22. These words of caution are not an estoppel for you all to enjoy life at this stage. The pleasure of childhood, and stress-free time is priceless. Hold it, enjoy and move forward.
23. In the coming years you will face different exams from school to college to university. One thing that will always remain with you is your ability to rise and rise again, from setbacks and move forward.

¹Twenge, J. M., Joiner, T. E., Rogers, M. L., & Martin, G. N. (2018). Increases in Depressive Symptoms, Suicide-Related Outcomes, and Suicide Rates Among U.S. Adolescents After 2010 and Links to Increased New Media Screen Time. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 6(1), 3-17.

² Tracey Burns and Francesca Gottschalk What Do We Know About Children and Technology
<https://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/Booklet-21st-century-children.pdf>

24. No Dreams and Aspirations are bigger than your confidence, hard work and dedication. Never let the adversities of life affect the spring of your golden days of school and college. As a character in the movie Forest Gump said "Always be able to look back and say, at least I didn't lead a humdrum life."

25. I wish you all the very best for your future.

26. In the end, I quote some lines by Robert Drake:

*"Sometimes,
I feel I want to go back in time...
Not to change things, but to feel a couple
of things twice.
Sometimes,
I wish I could go back to school...
Not to become a child but to spend more
time with those friends, I never met after
school.."*

कल्याणमस्तु