

March 18, 2020

*The message below was sent to all Georgetown Prep students from Rev. James R. Van Dyke, S.J., Prep's President.*

My Brothers,

It appears that we will not be seeing you for a while with the decision to close schools here in the Washington area. Although I am neither a medical doctor nor a public health expert, from my own reading I am aware that the focus of the public efforts are toward containment of this illness, which, while it is not likely to affect healthy people like you and me, could very severely impact people we love and others with whom we casually come in contact. I would ask you to be very mindful of that effort and supportive of it over the next several weeks as we await a return to normal. This will be hard; it is difficult to be separated from friends, teammates, classmates – our brothers. But I would ask you to be rigorous with yourselves now. Text, message, email, call, but resist the urge to gather.

And we will, at some point – hopefully soon – gather again. That is important to remember as these days drag a bit (and they will). What may have once seemed mundane – the morning ride to school, the cup of coffee in the South Room or Café, the race back and forth across the Quad to classes, lunch in the South Room, the routines of school and workouts, the passing glances of friends and acquaintances throughout the day, the fist bumps, all that we normally take for granted – may be missed for some time. But there will come a time when they reemerge as a part of our daily lives, and what had seemed so ordinary will become what they have been all along – nothing less than a wonder.

Until that time, I want to remind you of a few things:

§First, make sure you keep up with school. It will be very easy to let things slip – to let yourself slip. Remember that the aim is to help you keep in touch with your intellectual life and to progress to the next step. For the seniors, this means we want to make sure you graduate, and on time, and that you are well prepared for the college life, both intellectually and personally. For the juniors and underclassmen, we want to make sure that this crisis does not derail your hopes for the future, even if you are not sure yet what those might be.

- Second, look after yourself. I mentioned the other day the simple importance of staying healthy. That's easy to ignore when you're sitting home looking at a computer screen. Make sure you are eating well, hydrating, and especially getting enough sleep. That last one is really important. One of the best things you can do during these days to make them successful and helpful to you is setting a schedule for yourself – setting a bedtime that you stick to, setting a time to wake up, following your schedule, including scheduling appropriate breaks. That's one

of the most important things you can learn in life: creating a structure that will help you be successful and healthy, not only as a student, but more importantly as a person.

- Look after each other. One of the things we take for granted is how much in the course of our day at Prep through simple casual contact we actually care about each other. It still amazes me that students can read pretty well when I am stressed – and I'm one of the least visible people on campus – and how much I can spot a guy who's dragging a bit. We're not going to be in close contact the same way for a little while, and for some of us it's going to take some work to stay in touch. It will help a lot if we take time to make a phone call or text. It lets us know that we do matter to each other. If we are not careful, this could become a lonely experience. For some of us, it will be terribly lonely.
- Although what we are facing is fearsome, try not to give into fear. Take time to pray, to meditate, to be quiet with yourself. A few minutes of simple deep breathing has an incredible effect in terms of lowering heart rate and blood pressure. Anxiety can be incredibly difficult, and these are anxious times. Believe it or not, the Examen that you've been learning is a wonderful weapon against it, as is any form of meditation. If you need a resource, the [3 Minute Retreat](#) is a wonderful way to spend a few minutes in the Ignatian Spirituality you've been immersed in at Prep.
- Finally, don't become house-bound. Yes, we're not going to be at school, and yes, we're going to be on-line a lot for course work. But when you can, get outside. Play catch. Ride your bike. Sit out in the backyard. Help your mom with the garden. Work on the crossword puzzle over a cup of hot tea on the front porch. Take your little sister for a walk. Play with the dog. Go for a run. As the Scriptures remind us, we are creatures of the light, and the Good Book was not referring to computer screens. Indoors and in the dark is depressing; light and fresh air are a tremendous cure.

I was talking with T.J. Williams the other morning. He's so disappointed, and rightly, about baseball –the trip down to Florida and at least a good chunk of the season – being canceled. It is disappointing for so many of us – our hopes, plans, dreams for this spring suddenly snatched away. But there are opportunities as well: the opportunity to learn patience, to connect with some people, i.e., our families, with whom we sometimes have precious little time to spend, to read, to take time, to reflect, to look at the world around us. We do not yet know what this time will be about in our lives, but we can choose to make of it what we want: to use it or to waste it, to invest in it or to squander it, to grow through it or to grow stale. The choice is ours.

Whatever you do, whatever choices you make, please remember the challenge Prep has placed before us – before each one of us, me as well as you – to be men for and with others. That call does not change just because we are not together here at Prep for a while. In fact, a day will come when none of us, me as well as you, will be here together but the call to us will be the same wheresoever we may be. That call has been the prompt to so many who have gone before us here at Prep to make a difference in our world, and it is our turn now.

It may be a while until we return – I don't know. But please know that you are missed on this too, too quiet campus. We will listen for the echo of your laughter in the Quad, your cheers in the stands, your shouts on the fields, your dumb jokes in dozens of languages in the South Room, your conversation in the classrooms, your footsteps on every stair.

And one day, we will not have to listen anymore, because you will be here again.

We look forward to that day. In the meantime, let us pray for one other.

God bless, always.

Fr.

P.S. Oh...I almost forgot: Louis Messina.