

Thank you...

Now for the moment you have all dreaded – my speech.

Dan Griffin is in the back of the room taking bets on the over/under for 44 ties...

Dave Conroy is in the center pew taking bets on the over/under on the length of my speech – it's now 25 minutes before 12:00. What time do you have to leave Father?

Allow me to begin by congratulating Wendell Young on receiving the Fr. Joseph Hogan, SJ Award. Today may have been the first day we met but growing up a stone's throw from OLC in Northeast Philadelphia I am well aware of your tireless efforts to help provide a living wage for thousands of workers. Truly a "man for others" in the Jesuit tradition. Congratulations!

Secondly a special thank you to Fr. Bur for celebrating our beautiful mass today! Shame on Drexelbrook for nixing the incense ;(Congratulations are also in order for Father who was just chosen to become the 31st president of St. Joseph's Prep. I know he'll do a great job – for nothing could more difficult than leading our group of knuckleheads through the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius every Saturday morning for the last 6 months.

When I received the phone call from my good friend and fellow retreatant Rich Brennan, and the official letter from the president of the National Alumni Board and former Hawk mascot Dennis Sheehan -- I was speechless. Unfortunately for all of you I've had plenty of time to recover. I spoke with the director of Alumni Relations Frank DeVecchis this morning and promised to deliver a speech no more than 2 hours - with one brief intermission -- so fasten your seatbelts.

While a freshman at Holy Ghost Prep the late Fr. Henry Brown told me to always stay humble - for I have much to be humble about. So it is with great humility that I accept this award given to me by the alumni association of my alma mater, named after my favorite saint. I remain humbled for I know there are so many more deserving candidates for this award, and I see many of them right here in this room. The words of the great Trappist Monk Thomas Merton come to mind...

"The humble man receives praise the way a clean window takes the light of the sun. The truer and more intense the light is, the less you see of the glass."

That being said receiving this award has been a great thrill for me. The last time I received an award was in grade school for being the best altar boy. So it has been a long, dry spell ;-)

I stand here in awe because the reason we are all gathered here is because of St. Ignatius. Had the Basque nobleman, soldier, and sinner not been hit by a French cannon ball at the battle of Pamplona --- who knows where we would be today? There would have no metanoia for Inigo, so there certainly would have been no Jesuit Order, and consequently there would have been no Saint Joseph's University. I guess the worst case scenario would be that despite our high SAT scores we would have been forced to attend Villanova. And instead today I would have been here before you receiving the Rev. Martin Luther OSA Award. Sed libera nos a malo indeed! Thank God for the inaccuracy of French cannons.

But he was hit by that cannon ball, which brought Inigo to his epiphany during his convalescence at Loyola Castle, which led him on his spiritual journey to Manresa, Monseratt, Salamanca, Paris, Jerusalem and finally to Rome. Along with 9 friends he created a company, the Company or Society of Jesus, with absolutely no financing or business plan, and they placed themselves at the disposal of the Pontiff to do all things for the greater glory of God -- wherever that would be. Different from traditional orders like the Benedictines or Dominicans, Jesuits did not want to stay behind monastery walls but chose to be "contemplatives in action". 468 years later that company, the Jesuits, is still going strong, and still finding God in all things, all over the world, in 122 countries, in Philadelphia since 1733, and at our university since 1851. We are fortunate to be the beneficiaries of the "long black line", which has given the Church 50 saints, 235 men declared blessed, and close to 600 martyrs for the Faith.

A few of you may know that I send an occasional email out to a few people, under the title of 44's Hawk Hill Buddy List ;-). The origin is easily explained. The best man in my wedding, also known as my father/aka Frank/aka Boze, is an alumnus of St Joseph's College, class of 1961-- which means that I have been a Hawk since conception, and will be a Hawk until 5 minutes after death. Attending hundreds of games with him at the Palestra and FH further sealed my fate. The passion is in my blood. My crimson and gray blood. Our crimson and gray blood. Many have asked why it was started. It was truly "cut and paste" at the beginning, as I would fax copies of PDN articles about Hawk basketball to my friend John Prendergast SJC '48. When the internet age dawned, I found I could send articles about our Hawks and our university much easier, and a few more people were added. People, some I knew, some I've yet to meet, would often write to me to keep a friend in my prayers -- so a prayer list was added as well. And of course I took the opportunity to share articles on Catholic, Ignatian, and Jesuit Spirituality... and intentionally would put them near the Cheerleader of the Day picture so that they had a better chance of being read! I consider it to be a privilege to keep people, especially those Hawks living outside the metropolitan area, in touch with Hawk Hill. It is my passion.

Of course as Hogan Award winner and former alumni director Dave Dorsey reminds me quarterly -- it is my wife Lisa who should be commended for allowing me the time to pursue this passion. In fact Dave feels that Lisa should be canonized just for putting up with me. I might concur, but in those rare times when we disagree it would be exponentially more difficult for me to win the day if I had to refer to her as 'St. Lisa of Cherry Hill'. Honeybun works much better. After that last line I think part of Lisa now wishes I became a Jesuit.

My parents (and grandparents) gifted me my Catholic faith, and the good Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and Holy Ghost Prep gave me not only a wonderful education but the foundation of my faith -- as nothing can be accomplished without a good foundation. My sister Lucinda has the unenviable task of being my "guardian angel". It is a lifelong job that requires much OT. And it is a job she continues to perform quite well. It was the Jesuits however who enabled me to grow into my Catholicism as an adult -- and "who caused the scales to fall from my eyes".

Pedro Arrupe, the Father General of the Jesuits from 65 – 81, whom I hope will one day be declared Blessed by the Church, was invited to address an international group of Jesuit alumni in Valencia, Spain. Most in attendance might have thought it would be your typical congratulatory, "atta boy" speech. It wasn't. Early in his speech he asked if their Jesuit teachers had adequately educated them for justice. He answered for them --- "no, we have not". He went on to say that ...

"Education for justice has become in recent years one of the chief concerns of the Church. Why? Because there is a new awareness in the Church that participation in the promotion of justice and the liberation of the oppressed is a constitutive element of the mission which Our Lord has entrusted to her... Today our prime educational objective must be to form men-and-women-for-others; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ – for the God- human who lived and died for all the world; men and women who cannot even conceive of love of God which does not include love for the least of their neighbors; men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce. This kind of education goes directly counter to the prevailing educational trend practically everywhere in the world"

Similarly, when his successor Fr.General Peter Hans Kolvenbach visited St. Joseph's a decade ago ... he advised that...

“YOU ARE CALLED BY THE SOCIETY OF JESUS TO BE MEN AND WOMEN WHO REFLECT UPON THE REALITY OF THE WORLD AROUND YOU, WITH ALL ITS AMBIGUITIES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHALLENGES IN ORDER TO DISCERN WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING IN YOUR LIFE AND IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

TO FIND GOD THERE AND TO DISCOVER WHERE GOD IS CALLING YOU, TO EMPLOY CRITERIA FOR SIGNIFICANT CHOICES THAT REFLECT GODLY VALUES RATHER THAN NARROW, ELUSIVE SELF-INTEREST.

TO DECIDE IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT IS TRULY FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF GOD AND THE SERVICE OF THOSE IN NEED, AND THEN TO ACT ACCORDINGLY.”

It is because of my Jesuit education that the words of Arrupe and Kovenbach haunt me. As does the Parable of the Talents found in the Gospel of Matthew. As does the Magis. Many of you know that I, along with my good friend and fellow alumnus John Gill, have coached at the Young Scholars Charter School at 13th and Master Streets in North Philadelphia for the past two years. When John and I signed our lucrative contracts to coach (;-), adding buddy Chris Lester to our well paid staff this year!, we assumed our primary objective would be to teach the game we love to the boys, as our fathers had taught us: to shoot a layup off the correct foot, to take away the sideline on a zone press, to box out, to keep your elbow in and follow through on your shot -- all while exhibiting good sportsmanship. Yet it didn't take long to realize that this duty paled in comparison to trying to get our boys in the best schools possible. The school, under the leadership of Lars Beck and the untiring efforts of Kevin Dougherty and Kim Jennings, leaves no stone unturned when trying to get our kids the very best in secondary educational opportunities. John and I have tried to do what we could as well. The school has had some amazing successes -- but the Magis --- did we do enough?

Fr. Edward Gannon, who many of you might have known as he taught at St. Joseph's, at Scranton and at Wheeling Jesuit, once told me that he didn't think that we would be judged on how many times we made or missed Mass, but on how we took care of those that God placed in our charge.

It is in this spirit that I must ask a favor. I am looking for someone to endow two scholarships each year. One from YSCS to St. Joseph's Prep for one of our qualified gentlemen, and one from YSCS to Little Flower Catholic High School for Girls for one of our qualified ladies. Both are excellent Catholic schools which will provide a quality faith based education, Both are easily accessible by public transportation, and both practice the cura personalis - which our kids need today more than ever. What I ask for is not cheap, I realize that. But you would be giving a gift that can never be taken away -- one's education. And your blessings would be many.

Please forgive me if this request seems too bold, or if this an improper forum. I remember the words of Fr. Willie Walsh, who taught me Ignatian Spirituality on Hawk Hill before he left for China to follow in the footsteps of Matteo Ricci; "the Holy Spirit speaks to us like water dripping on a sponge. You must be very quiet to hear Him".

After much discernment I thought it was worth mentioning. Besides, part of the blame must go to our president Fr. Timothy Lannon, who has mandated that...

"our curriculum must reflect a faith that promotes justice. Justice must be sought through the rigorous analysis of complex social, political, economic and moral issues. Reliable analysis combined with infectious passion can bring us to a more just world. We cannot forget that the promotion of social justice at St. Joseph's University is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ".

If you know of anyone who can help me, help us... it's SJHAWK44@aol.com, and I would be eternally grateful.

The only thing that could have made this day better is if my mother could have been with us. Long before I knew who St. Ignatius was, or what a Jesuit was, it the lady from Swampoodle who taught me about the love of Christ, about self sacrifice, and about, as Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta said " not to do great things, but small things with great love". Knowing my devotion to the Basque pilgrim, she wanted to buy me a statue of Ignatius for my birthday. Always going right to the top she called Fr. Nick Rashford to ask about the selection of Ignatian statues they had in our bookstore. With regret he informed her that although it is a Jesuit institution, they had no statuary of the order's founder, or its patron. So she went to plan B and her friend Selma Fisher found her one through a contact in Spain. A beautiful one, in black cassock, complete with golden halo, holding a book with that beautiful Latin Jesuit acronym AMDG. It is a gift I shall always treasure, and this award will be placed right next to it. There were many times in my youth that I did things that must have made her shake her head. I hope this helps make up for some of that -- and that she's looking down from Heaven, if only for a moment, and perhaps while having a cigarette and a beer with Lisa's mom Arlene, and they're both smiling.

Some might not believe this but I actually read all those Jesuit articles I put in the e-mail! I came one across recently from Jesuit Fr. Dean Brackley. For those unaware Fr was teaching at Fordham University when the 6 Jesuits, their cook, and her daughter were assassinated by government agents in El Salvador in 1989. Fr. Brackley finished out the semester and boarded a plane to replace one of the Jesuits martyred there. He's been there ever since. In an article penned for America Magazine he mentioned Sr. Ita Ford, an American Maryknoll Missionary who was tortured and killed for being a 'subversive' by the military in El Salvador. Killed by men trained at Ft. Benning, GA, better known on the 79 Jesuit campuses as the 'School of the Assassins'. Before her martyrdom at age 40 she wrote a prophetic letter to her niece Jennifer...

"I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for -- maybe even worth dying for -- something that energizes you,

enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be.
That's for you to find, to choose, to love."

Allow me to leave you with a poem you have all heard, but it bears repeating, perhaps each and every day after we hit the knees. It is by our friend Don Pedro and it is called Falling in Love

"Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in a love in a quite absolute, final way.

What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything.

It will decide what will get you out of bed in the mornings, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.

Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything."

In closing...

May God continue to bless His one, holy catholic and apostolic Church, and may the gates of hell never prevail against her.

May God continue to bless the Society of Jesus, all of their good works, and increase their vocations.

May God continue to bless our alma mater, Saint Joseph's, so that it may always remain Catholic and Jesuit -- a place where faith meets reason -- a place where we train our young to become men and women with and for others, for the greater glory of God.

and may God continue to bless each and every one of you.

There will be many days in my life which will be lost from my memory. Today will not be one of them. Thank you for this great honor... and thank you for sharing the day with me.

In omnibus quearant Deum.

The Hawk Will Never Die!

Thomas F. Brzozowski ad majorem Dei gloriam.