

“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the glory”

M.I 218. *Mission Impossible 218*, starring David Penaluna as Ilya Kuryakin – whoops! Wrong show, same idea. *“This mission should you choose to accept it ...”*

Should you choose to accept it, you are thinking? What choice did I have, you are asking? Here you are stuffed into boiled wool tunics and itchy skirts and stuffed into the Church after a week of mud, glorious mud, at least for the Rugby mugwumps, the mudmucks of the scrum, after a week of dreary drizzle and drill, after a week of band and choir, after a week of intense intellectual concentration in IB exams, after a week, in short, of everything. Choice, you say! What choice? Ruck over! Are we having fun yet?

Mission Impossible 218. From 1788 to 2006. You are part of a story, part of a history and a tradition, part of a history and a tradition that belongs to a mission, the remarkable mission and adventure of the educational programme of King’s-Edgehill School. In a way, the whole year of that programme is concentrated into the span of this week, culminating in our gathering here. Oh, I know, from the standpoint of the secular mind, this is just one more thing in a sequence of events, a run-on of the endless run-on of one darn thing after another, the tyranny of linear progression at the expense of the intellect, of the gathering into purpose and understanding. But here we are and here we must be, in a reflective and contemplative moment that allows for the possibility, so remote and yet so near, that we might just think together about the mission.

Isn’t it all about me? You may be asking. No. Not at all. It is not about you at all except to the extent that you are very much part of something else, part of the programme, part of the vision and the mission. That is something far bigger than ourselves. The only question is whether we can think it and will it, whether we can honour the principles and the ideals that in one way or another have been handed on to us. Notice that I said, *‘we’*. It concerns us all, students and teachers, coaches and parents.

Isn’t it all about the School, then? You may be asking. No. Not at all, really. It is not about the School at all except to the extent that the School itself exists for certain principles and ideals that are greater than itself; in short, that it exists for a greater purpose, one that places you within a wider community of interests. Bishop Charles Inglis, the founder of the School and College, having experienced first hand the destructive and iconoclastic effects of the American Revolution, sought to establish a programme of education that might ground the political and social life of a rather primitive Maritime and Canadian world upon a stable intellectual and spiritual foundation.

A daunting prospect, a mission impossible in the face of anti-intellectual passions and enthusiasms of his day, not very much unlike the same in our own, it has a compelling power and force. It signaled a commitment to classical principles at a

time when the entire world around him seemed to have lost its head, literally and metaphorically. A mission that, in some sense, is ours, too. An educational programme for the whole person, mind, body and soul, that centers on a sense of purpose, a commitment to truth. What is education *for*?

The answer is captured in a motto. What motto? "*Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness*"? "*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*"? No, not those things abstractly considered, for that is the problem, the Enlightenment problem, as it were, but rather as rooted and grounded in something far more comprehensive and complete, and, in a way, quite impossible: "*Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi*". You wear it emblazoned on the crests of your school uniforms and team outfits. You see it engraved on the apse of Convocation Hall, embossed on the floor of the Ted Canavan Athletic Centre and annealed in glass in the School Chapel. You see it but do you read it? Do you give it any heed? And yet it signals what we are *for*.

That we are *for* something is already a counter and a challenge to the existential pragmatism of our world and day, that despair of the understanding that buries itself in the quagmire of endless busyness in order to avoid the question, the serious question, '*what are we for*'? The answer? "*Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi*". "*For God, for the Law, for the King, for the Masses*", the people. It is the motto of the School and the College. But if we don't think it, then we can't even begin to live it. "*Fideliter*", the motto of Edgehill now married to King's, emphasizes that *faithfulness* to that vision is our mission.

And what, then, does that mean? Simply all of the things of this week and year, all of the things of *Mission Impossible 218*. But why impossible? Haven't you been doing it? Yes. And wonderfully so, especially in this week of intensity. But, as something for which we exist, it is always beyond us, always something for which we strive to enter into and to live out more and more fully. How? By the consecration of minds, our bodies and our souls to the ideals and principles of the mission. Without that we are nothing but empty pride and arrogant pretension.

The late Jane Jacob in her book *Dark Age Ahead*, comments on a contemporary problem, a kind of disease of the soul, that she calls "*cultural amnesia*", which happens when a community or an institution forgets its animating principles and the legacies of its past. The consequence is the ruin of the institutions that shape and dignify human lives, the ruin of family, church, state and school. In a town preoccupied with pumpkins and pucks, you have been a visible reminder of the larger legacy of learning and service that is a substantial part of Windsor's past and present and which connects the town to a wider world of letters and ideas. The School in its purpose and mission lives beyond itself and not merely for itself. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi*.

Tonight, in the quiet beauty of May, "*when the evening is spread out against the sky,*" you made your way through the streets of Windsor to Christ Church. Are

these the streets “that follow like a tedious argument/ of insidious intent/ To lead you to an overwhelming question...”, as T.S. Eliot puts it, the question about what are we here for? “Oh, do not ask, “what is it?” /Let us go and make our visit.” But this service is not about a visit. It is about our abiding in the force and truth of that overwhelming question, that question of purpose faced and engaged, the purposive *for* is what it is all about. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi.*

And hasn't it been fun! Wait before you answer that! Think for a moment. Think about all the things, the incredible array of things that you have done this week and this year. Think about how that incredible array of things places you in the company of the community of the past who have consecrated their lives to the same mission. You are students from the Maritimes and from all over the world. You are a veritable microcosm of the contemporary global community, and just as you have marched through the streets of Windsor, so, too, you will go out into the streets of the world. You will take with you the things that have become a part of you because of this week and this year, the things of *Mission Impossible 218*. You will go out, we hope, with a sense of conviction and commitment to the ideals and principles for which we exist. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi.*

Things worth doing are worth doing well. But to do things well means all of the fun of this week. “Girls just want to have fun”, “Boys ‘r us”, right? This is what you came from Mexico for, right? From Hong Kong? From Taiwan? From Germany? From Slovakia? From Wolfville? For what? To be yelled at? Well, of course! And by a most wonderful and remarkable collection of educational oddballs, a faculty who actually care enough to yell at you, cajole you, scold you, command you, teach you, and think with you, cry with you, laugh with you, suffer with you, and pray with you. And only so, have you been able to do great things. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi.*

It must seem awfully strange at times. “If I have told you once, I have told you a thousand times, shoot out your foot!” the Major said, and with a full finger salute for emphasis. Note the power of prepositions. He did not say, “shoot off your foot!” Fortunately, those rifles aren't loaded. And what is one to make of a game which goes forward by going backward? Rugby is, of course, an ancient British sport but just how far back it goes has only recently been discovered in the *Mystery of Stonehenge Decoded*. We are now given to understand that the 30 stones of the Sarsen Circle actually represent a scrum-down which goes to show that Rugby is one of the world's oldest religions. If you believe that, then you really are a sucker for the *Da Vinci Code*.

“So dark the con of man”, you may be thinking, or at least the con of the Rev. Perhaps, this, too, is all a conspiracy, the King's-Edgehill conspiracy. Actually, you are right. But it is the conspiracy of education where we are truly *con spiritus*, minds working together in the pursuit of the understanding of the truth as opposed to the manipulation of emotions and opinions for the sake of power and

control, the conspiracies of destruction and iconoclasm, the breaking of the images of the understanding through the will to power.

"The owl of Minerva flies at dusk", the philosopher Hegel famously said. Wisdom found in the twilight of an evening is about the serious commitment to the task of the understanding. It takes discipline. Who would have ever thought that it is so hard to put one foot in front of another until you had to do it together in a company of other *two-footed wonders* like yourself? And in a slow march? Slow *two-footed wonders* like yourself? All of that has to be learned. Bravo.

The discipline of putting one foot after another, the discipline of listening for your note, the discipline of paying attention to words written and spoken, the discipline of watching and observing; in short, the learning that takes place on the parade field, on the rugby pitch, in the classroom, in the Chapel, is all part of the conspiracy of education at King's-Edgehill School. And you have learned it wonderfully in the intensity of this year and this week.

It is wonderful and not a little bit humbling, I think, to look at you in the splendour of the sunset ceremony, the Cadet Inspection and the Church Parade and to realize just what you have done. There is a kind of glory that is achieved in the commitment to the things that have been required of you. I salute you for your commitment to the things that are greater than yourself, the ideals and principles that dignify and sanctify our humanity, the things that counter the debilitating and despairing features of the culture of entitlement, the deadly culture of immediate self-gratification and its twin, self-destruction, the culture of drugs, death and self-will, the culture of nihilism, the culture of purpose denied and refused, the culture of 'it's all about me'.

It doesn't mean that mistakes don't happen. It doesn't mean that we don't screw up. It doesn't mean that there aren't failures and only successes. No. The real success lies in sticking to it, in keeping to the commitment in and through the hardships and the sorrows, the disappointments and the failures. Therein lies the glory. For what is concentrated and distilled into the space of an evening is but the truth of this phenomenal year.

Fragile and Strong. The fragility and the strength of life. Like glass that is at once brittle and easily broken and yet can portray in stained glass such powerful images of strength, even *"the strength of conviction."* IB Grade 12 English students take note, the exam is tomorrow. A double literary reference to Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* and to Timothy Findley's *The Wars* with a further reference, take note Grade Ten, to *The Stone Angel*. What means *"strength of conviction"*? You, in the progress of this year and this week. For we behold the heroes of such *"strength of conviction"* in our school in and through the sadnesses and the struggles of this year.

There is Mobolajii Joseph whose father died in Nigeria this year. There is Charbel Rouhana whose struggle we salute and continue to pray for after his devastating accident, praying for him and for his family. There is Lukas Roiko, another hero, wonderfully back in our midst after his life-altering experience. Lukas, we salute you. You can't know how much you have given back to the School by your return. There is our beloved Headmaster among us again after his troubles. There is so much to be thankful for, so much to pray for. You see, our School is like a city on a hill, at once a community and a family where so much is learned but only by way of the commitment and the compassion, the commitment and the compassion that so many of you have shown. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi.*

It has been a remarkable year and one that has been faced in and through "*the strength of conviction*" about the principles that define the vision and the mission. Left to ourselves we are nothing worth. Only when we let these principles and ideas that are greater than ourselves live in us do we become something glorious. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi.*

I know, if wisdom flies at dusk, you are thinking, then why do we have Chapel in the morning when the seniors are bleary-eyed and sleepy, the juniors chatter like magpies, and the faculty... no, let's not go there? Boring, you think. Cadets is boring, you say. Class is boring, you say. School is boring, you say. Everything is boring! And just what makes you think that you are so exciting?

No. What is truly exciting and truly fun is what you have accomplished together this year and this week. Think about what war stories you can tell your grandchildren! Just think how many more Grampy Darcy Walsh has to tell!

And think, too, a little more humbly about the stories of the heroes of *The Battle of the Atlantic*, whom we commemorate this day and whose sacrifices make possible the things that you have accomplished. A little drizzle and a little mud? How does that even begin to compare to the horrors of war in the wild, tempestuous seas of the North Atlantic?

No. Part of our gathering has to be about those qualities of remembering, the remembering of the principles of the School and the recalling of the sobering realities of war. A remembering that has altogether to do with God. For faith without worship is mere illusion and the idolatry of the self. Tonight's lessons perhaps perplex and enlighten in equal measure.

Why read about the Ten Commandments in the wonder of the season of the Resurrection? What is this city adorned as a bride? In the lesson from Deuteronomy (5.1-21) which Anton Nestel read, we are reminded of the moral universe in which we find ourselves; all our shortcomings notwithstanding. The light of the Resurrection allows us to see the Law, encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, through the eyes of grace which perfects nature even as "*mercy seasons justice.*" In the lesson from Revelations (21. 9-end) which Monica Munro

read, we behold a vision of the city of God, the city of our humanity restored and renewed, the apostolic city, the city of those who are sent, the city that is the mission, the city in which we participate through our commitment to the things which are greater than ourselves. We behold what makes *Mission Impossible 218* somehow possible, namely, the grace of God who journeys with us in the triumphs and the sorrows of our lives.

In other words, what we behold in this service is not just ourselves as turned in upon ourselves but the exact opposite, ourselves as opened out to the truth of God. Therein lies the true glory which bestows glory upon us, the glory of God which embraces us and makes us glorious in the truth of his presence. The scattered events of this year are gathered up like the leaves of Sibyll's prophecies into the Lamb's book of life. "*For everything the will is ever sought/ Is gathered there*", gathered into prayer and praise, and "*there is every quest/ Made perfect.*" (Dante, *Paradiso, Canto XXXIII*). But only through the commitment to the mission. *Deo Legi Regi Gregi.*

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Easter III, '06*