

*“There was a certain rich man ... and there was
a certain beggar named Lazarus”*

Lazarus is lying at your feet, and what will you do? “*Ye have the poor with you always,*” Jesus says, “*and whensoever ye will ye may do them good.*” What do we will and what will we do?

So much of what we do as a school is concentrated in the events of this incredible week and concentrated, too, in our gathering here this evening. It is a bit of everything, isn't it? Just when it seems that nothing more could possibly be squeezed into your lives, then more and more is constantly expected of you – classes and clubs, choir and chapel, IB exams and math tournaments, public speaking contests and call-to-remembrance competitions, rugby and track, badminton and ball, tae kwon do and table-tennis, and with a little bit, just a wee little bit extra of cadets thrown in for good measure.

There is a wonderful concatenation of events in the musical extravaganza of the Spring Fling followed by the scarlet splendour of the Sunset Ceremony in the quiet cool of a Friday evening, and then the arresting and extraordinary sight of the entire school marshaled as a Corps for inspection in the ice cold damp of a Saturday morning, the chosen frozen on parade, and now this evening, the moving spectacle of the Corps on the march through the town of Windsor to arrive here as one body in this place. Utterly remarkable, if you think about it. This week at King's-Edgehill, it seems, is not just IB plus, but IB plus plus plus! All in all a seemingly endless parade of duties and obligations, responsibilities and challenges. So what else is new? Exhausted and stressed? So what else is new?

Lazarus is lying at your feet, and what will you do?

Will it ever end? In a way, no. Like good epic poetry, we begin and end *in media res*, in the midst of things, things, however, that signal a purpose and that are themselves part and parcel of that purpose. At issue is simply what will you do in the midst of these things? “*In the midst of this way of life, I awoke,*” Dante says, “*in a dark wood where the right way was lost and gone.*” The whole of his epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*, points not merely to the recovery of the right way but to the discovery of a great good in *selva selvaggia*, in the savage wilderness of human lives, broken and in disarray, confused and scattered, exhausted and stressed, busy. Somehow there is the possibility of learning a great good in the midst of things, even in the midst of the cold and the muck of a Maritime spring. There is the possibility of our awakening to understanding. How?

By paying attention. Some of you, if you were paying attention, know the story of Menelaus and Proteus in Homer's *Odyssey* where Menelaus has to question the Old Man of the Sea, Proteus, about the conditions for the homecoming of the Greeks. To question him is no easy feat. It means holding on as Proteus shifts

and changes into one form and another until he is his true self and has to speak the truth to Menelaus. Holding on is about paying attention. It is about discovering a great good, namely, the way of truth while being in the midst of things. But it means holding on. It means paying attention. Without that no truth can be learned and there can be no homecoming, no parade, no accomplishment, no glory.

What great good, you are asking? What's the good of wearing a skirt – I know the Scots call it a kilt, but really, a skirt's a skirt for "*a' that and that*" and "*a man's a man*", no, let's not go there! What's the good of marching and mud, you have been asking? And I know you have! What's the good of being cajoled and yelled at? Get that ball, you ... (politically incorrect descriptor carefully omitted)! Of being commanded and directed? Go here. Do this. Left! No! Right! Now! No. Later! No, you should be there already, you ... (politically incorrect descriptor carefully omitted)! Of being required to do this and that and everything? What's the good of education, you really mean? I'm tired. I'm cold. I'm whiny. Just call me Canadian. Is that what it comes to? A nation of wusses? I hope not. Especially on the day of the remembrance of the Battle of the Atlantic. Especially so soon after the remembrance of Vimy Ridge. Especially after the deaths in Easter week of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan.

But you are not. For a moment, and just a moment, look at your selves as a whole. Look around. Look at yourself as part of a larger whole, as part of a body, as members of a Corps. As our Headmaster wisely remarked, this is probably the largest body or group of which you will ever really be a part. Cherish it. Celebrate it. Honour it. Because what it means is really what King's-Edgehill School, with all its bumps and bruises, faults and failings, is really all about. An education that is not about self-indulgence and entitlement but sacrifice and commitment, about generosity and gratitude. And it takes one simple thing that runs through the whole of the school year and through all of the incredible things of this week.

That one simple thing is discipline. I don't mean the threat or the promise of coercion and force, the merely external application of authority. I mean discipline as learning. I mean discipline as paying attention to one another, paying attention to the things that comprise our life together as a school, paying attention to something that is greater than your self, singing another song than "*it's all about me*", which by interpretation really means, pardon my Pink Floyd imitation, "*We don't need no education.*"

Note the double negative. Proof that you do need an education. I rest my case.

You see, it's not about you. It's not even about us. It is about what we are for. And that is the challenge.

Lazarus is lying at your feet, and what will you do?

This week especially is about paying attention and holding on to the principles which belong to our life together as a school, as a corps, as a body, we might say, holding on to the things that belong to the good of the school without which the school, too, is good for nothing. There are two words which the Headmaster has constantly and consistently emphasized over the years. They are generosity and gratitude, words that are all together crucial to the discipline of learning.

In the lesson which Hannah read tonight from that grand narrative of purposive journeying, *The Book of Exodus*, we hear about gifts that are given that become talents and skills, talents and skills that are given for the purpose of building of a sanctuary honouring God. Ability and intelligence are realized in a common endeavour when it is embraced with willing and generous hearts; every one *"in whose mind the Lord had put ability, every one whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work."* That combination of willingness and generosity runs through the whole chapter and culminates in a vision of super-abundance, *"the people bring[ing] much more than enough for doing the work which the Lord [had] commanded [them] to do."* More, you see, not less. Good enough isn't good enough. Good enough is just another word for mediocrity.

God, Moses says, fills us with his spirit, *"with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship"* for all manner of things. Think of the things that you have accomplished, musically, artistically, athletically and intellectually and realize that none of those things have happened just by yourself alone but only because of those who have been *"inspired to teach"* you, as Moses puts it, and because you are part of an order and a structure, a corps and a body, where such potentialities become actualities.

Oh, I know, I know. You know it all already. You know everything. We know nothing. But it's not easy knowing everything, is it? I often wonder how you manage it walking about with a mirror looking at yourself singing to yourself *"I know everything."* Of course, the flip side of the sign that says *"I know everything"* is *"I am an idiot."* Well, guess what? There is no room in a school, in a corps, in a body, for idiots, for self-indulgent twits who think they know it all and that all that matters is themselves. You aren't here by yourself. You didn't walk alone. You are not idiots and neither are your teachers and coaches, instructors and leaders. And the skills and talents that you have acquired are in some sense more than individual; they arise from the body of our collective life together. We don't know it all and we aren't everything. That's why you are here and here in such splendour, the splendour of the school as a Corps, the splendour that bespeaks, I hope, a generosity of spirit and not self-indulgence.

It is a challenge. No doubt about it. It has been a knee-knocking, teeth-chattering and bone-chillingly cold week. But may I remind you that the Battle of the Atlantic was no Caribbean cruise? May I remind you, as Jared pointed out so powerfully, that Vimy Ridge was no pleasant summer's walk in the park? May I remind you that Dominic's ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro was for something other

than a pretty view? All these things of which we are a part in and through the events of the year distilled into the span of a week and the space of an evening speak to the greatest challenges of our culture. In a way, the strength of a culture can be measured by its commitment to the institutions that embody its mind, its spirit and its life, by *"the strength of conviction"*, dare I say, to such things as family, school, church and state, the interplay of the forms of our social and political life together. Without serious commitment and reflection upon those things, we are but idiots, I fear.

On that score, it is rather disturbing to discover that among Canadians who actually do give to charity the median amount annually is \$240.00.

Lazarus is lying at your feet, and what will you do?

Gratitude is about being thankful for all that you are a part of and to all who make that possible. Thanksgiving is a fundamental attitude of religion that translates directly into our lives with one another. Grade 10 students take note, not only is *"the quality of mercy not strain'd"*, not held back nor forced, but neither is the spirit of gratitude. It is a free act, the freest thing you can do. It is about recognizing something outside of yourself without which you are less than yourself.

So have you thanked those around you? Have you, for instance, thanked the kitchen staff, directly and personally, for their care of you? Have you, for instance, said thank you, directly and personally, to the housekeeping staff for what they do for you? Have you thanked your coaches and instructors in sports and clubs for their willingness to commit to you? Have you thanked your parents and house parents for putting up with you, for guiding and directing you? Perhaps, if you do, you may discover the surprising thing. Life is not so bad; it's really good.

Think for a moment about the musical. For a number of you, this opened out possibilities far beyond your dreams. So have you thanked those wonderful dramatic dancing queens, Ms. Sasaki and Ms. Cowles and the host of other staff and faculty that provided you with such opportunities to do more than what you could ever have expected of yourself? You see, there is a collection of wonderfully quirky people known as the faculty who are incredibly committed, I admit to using the word advisedly. They are a big part of what you have been able to accomplish. A word to the wise, remember to thank Ms. Mosher, but don't pester Esther!

You thanked the Headmaster collectively as a Corps and wonderfully and rightly so, but have you thanked him personally and directly for his direction and leadership? You see, being thankful is about paying attention to the people around you who have made things possible for you. Without them, there is only going madly off in all directions and I am not speaking just about rugby!

Lazarus is lying at your feet, and what will you do?

The Lesson which Mobolaji read speaks directly to our reality. There was a rich man and there was a poor man. He has a name, Lazarus. The one is a type; the other is a person, we might say. What's the parable about? It is about our indifference to one another. It is told to counter the deadly and destructive spirit of our indifference. Lazarus lies at the Rich Man's gate and the Rich Man ignores him. In ignoring the poor man, Jesus suggests, the Rich Man has ignored God, finding himself far from the redeemed company of humanity, imaged as Abraham's bosom. And it seems that he cannot learn because he has ignored all that was in his midst, Lazarus, but as well Moses and the Prophets, the Scriptures of instruction and learning. He cannot learn because he will not learn to pay attention. Absent from the Rich Man is compassion and commitment to anything other than his own self-interest. His indifference renders him unteachable and dead. He is trapped in the torments of his self-enclosed world, the world of himself. Hell is not other people; it is ourselves turned in upon ourselves.

It is a powerful story. Lazarus is lying at your feet and what will you do? "*Whensoever you will you can do good to them*", Jesus says profoundly and importantly. Not if but when. Something is required of us. To act with compassion means to recognize that Lazarus is lying at your feet and to want to do something about it.

At the long end of the day we are all Lazarus. The question is whether we will be rich towards God and act with compassion to those around us and to those in need, to those who are near and to those who are afar off, to the children of the world. It requires paying attention. It means seeing ourselves in the face of the poor and wanting to do what we can.

Think about it. You have had to watch your own feet but you also have to watch the feet of one another. You cannot be indifferent to the person before you, behind you and beside you. You cannot ignore the realities and the demands of the body.

For we, too, are part of that body of humanity. Lazarus is us. A corpse is a body. A dead body is a corpse. We meet here in the body of Christ, *corpus Christi*, a living body. So what kind of body are you going to be? Only our indifference to one another makes us the culture of the walking dead.

"What's past is prologue." Take note Grade 12 IB English. Whoops! You already had the exam. My stupid! But still "*what's past is prologue*" if we can pay attention and learn even from our follies and mistakes. Antonio, in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, speaks prophetically of what he will not learn from, like the Rich Man in the lesson. But we can. Convicted of the sin of the betrayal of his brother and forgiven, he remains indifferent and unrepentant. But "*I'll be wise hereafter and*

seek for grace", says Caliban. So there is hope. The choice in some sense is ours. What do we will and what will we do?

The story of Lazarus is the story of redemption. There is resurrection through our paying attention to God and to one another, through holding ourselves accountable individually and collectively to the principles which define our life together. Without them, we are nothing. To return to them is repentance and renewal resulting in resurrection, *"a sea-change into something rich and strange"*, but only if we pay attention.

Lazarus is us. A great good, indeed, is to be found through commitment and compassion, through gratitude and generosity, through the discipline of learning. You have done great things and greater things are expected of you but only through paying attention to the forms of our life together in the body.

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KES Cadet Church Parade May' 07