

## Easter Message from the President of Campion College

April 9, 2020.

Dear students, colleagues and friends of Campion College,

Greetings and peace from Campion College at this time of the Holy Week. I am sure you will agree with me that this Lenten season has been unusual, and proved to be more difficult than what most of us hoped for, or expected on Ash Wednesday. None of us expected that we would enter a phase of instability as we did in the past three weeks, in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, a virus that took away thousands of lives, made many more dangerously sick and caused countless of workers unemployment. This is not to mention how the global health care systems were challenged beyond their capacities. The scale of this global and social tragedy is sadly still in process at least for the immediate future. With new predictions, the health care authorities along with the local governments prescribed new measures and social distancing in the absence of a new vaccine that is not yet available. Needless to say that during this Lenten time we were forced to face the unknown virus with caution, anxiety and new praxes.

I am impressed by the courage and generosity of many institutions that collaborate with the healthcare authorities and local governments. The collaboration is both a sign and a source of consolation in knowing that none of us is facing this pandemic alone, even if we find ourselves in isolation under social distancing. The health of one citizen has become the health of his or her society. As the number of infected people keeps rising locally and globally, the unanimous efforts intensify to create infection-free zones. The commitments of many workers in aiding patients with the virus speak high to heaven, as all genuine prayers do. Their different works aligned to effectively flatten the curve of the virus spread, have new meaning: labour for mercy.

The Holy Week concludes the Lenten Season: With passion, death and resurrection. In other words, the Holy Week represents a peak period in the life of Christ. The pattern is clear that things get worse before they get better. This is an appropriate week to reflect on sickness and healing, as well as on death and life. These in themselves are huge topics but in the current pandemic they are personal experiences to many people. Dying is morbid and death is ugly. Having a new life, by comparison, is exciting with positive energy. Such contrasts help us to clarify ultimate priorities to enhance better the life we are given to live and how we carry these priorities in our daily commitments, namely: What should we live for and how?

The striking contrast of our pandemic between death and life parallels the contrast in the Gospel narratives of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. These

narratives add spiritual meaning to the current world's struggle against the viral attack. Few people accompanied Jesus to his death but many could not. We tend to feel far from death when we read mortality statistics of those affected by the Coronavirus. When we know someone dear to us, who is ill or dying from the virus, death draws a lot nearer to us, and as a result we have better understanding of the death of Lazarus and its effects on his community. We may feel helpless to aid someone dying but we can still walk with them in their dying days or hours through prayer and connectedness even under social distancing. At the foot of the Cross there was social distancing as the Romans soldiers made sure relatives or friends did not draw too near to comfort the crucified, yet the connectedness was not faded: Jesus comforted the good thief with the promise of Paradise, and missioned his mother, Mary, and the disciple, John, to behold one another.

Our Lord in the Gospel readings just before the Holy Week keeps asking us to believe in his words, his works and that he is sent by the Father. Words and works matter lots. They are twins in effect. Jesus shows us that words have power to change reality and even to give meaning to the struggles at hand, while his works testify to his words. Let us follow this pattern. For example, if we say in words that we will overcome the Coronavirus, then let our work be the conviction of our words through social distancing, supporting those who research for a vaccine and collaborate with the authorities who instruct us with measures.

As Easter draws near to us, let us strengthen one another with kind encouraging words and to remember that our work has spiritual meaning to our words. Our work these days entails working through the transformation needed from the spread of Coronavirus, to contain it before we find the appropriate vaccine. Death has its effects but life is stronger because it has the healing power to reduce the deadly effects and even to overcome them. I say that with conviction of faith that the Crucified is Risen – take courage. Happy Easter.



Fr. Sami Helewa, S.J.  
President