

Speech by Martin Khor at St Xavier's Institution Prize Giving and
Speech Day, 27 Sept 2018

SXI Board Chairman Mr Francis Loh

SXI Principal Mr Sim Hock Keat

Teachers, other staff and students of SXI

It is indeed a great privilege and pleasure for me to be invited as Guest of Honour and to speak today. I don't feel like a guest of honour. Instead I feel like a person who is honoured and privileged to be with you at this 2018 prize giving day.

I very much remember the many prize giving days I attended when I was a student in SXI. I was educated in this very school building for 11 years from Standard 1 to Form 5. Then I did my Form 6 in Singapore. With two other Xaverians we were in the first batch of students in National Junior College.

That was unfortunate in one big way: we missed being with the wonderful girls in SXI sixth form. My friends who were in Form 6 here had many great experiences. Some of them even had romances. And a few married their Form Six sweethearts. That led me to conclude that SXI is not only a historic school, the first Brothers school in our region, but also a romantic place.

Our Board Chairman Mr. Francis Loh was my classmate for most of my 11 years. We were very good friends. Even when he joined the Science class in Form 4 and 5, while I joined the Arts class. We had many good debates in those days, and great concerts too. The Science students came up with a class annual, The Laser. We in the Arts class came up with our annual too, called The Siren, which I edited. Of course the Laser was interesting with all the scientific information. But the Siren was exciting as it was more about life.

I also remember the prize giving days in SXI because of my father, Mr. Khor Cheang Kee. For many years he was Chairman of the Board of SXI. In that capacity he made the main speech on Speech Day. And it was always a highlight because of the many jokes he told, in between the good advice he would give. I would feel proud of my Dad on those Speech days. But he did more than give great speeches. He loved the school, as he was educated here as well, and he was very close to the Brothers, who made him an honorary Brother. He helped to build up the school. Today Mr Francis Loh and the Board is keeping up the good work, and Mr Sim our principal is keeping up the tradition and spirit that the Brothers brought to the school.

My father loved SXI and he loved creative writing in English. He later became a journalist at Straits Echo, then the Editor of the Straits Times and the Star. His best friend, Hon Sui Sen, was very good in Maths. He later became Finance Minister of Singapore. My father would visit his best friend's house every day after school. Actually he was interested in Hon Sui Sen's sister, named Margaret. So Khor Cheang Kee married Margaret, who became a teacher in Convent

Light Street. And that marriage between two students of SXI and Convent Light Street was the reason I and my brothers and sisters came into this world.

Today, in memory of the contributions made by my father to SXI, and in remembrance of his love for writing, I would like to announce that my brothers and sister and I have decided together with Mr. Francis Loh and Mr. Sim, to establish a new prize, called the Khor Cheang Kee prize for the best writing in English, to be given every year.

There will be a main prize comprising cash of RM500 and books by my father, and one or two consolation prizes as well, for the best essay or short story, written in English during the year. I hope many of you will take part in this. We leave it to the Principal and teachers to arrange for the competition, and I and my family members will also have a say in selecting the winning entries. We hope this prize will encourage good thinking, creativity and writing skills among SXI students.

In one of his speeches, my father would tell SXI students this saying:

There are many types of people.

There is the man or woman who knows not, but knows not that he knows not. He is a fool. Do not mix too much with him.

Then there is the person who knows not, and knows that he knows not. He is a good student. Teach him.

There is another person who knows, but he does not know that he knows. He is a person with talents that are still to be discovered. Encourage him and see him bloom.

Then there is the person who knows, and who knows that he knows. He is a wise man or woman. Follow him.

Finally there is the person who knows, who knows he knows, and teaches what knows to those who do not know. He or she is a Xavierian teacher. Learn from them. And one day hopefully you too will be the wise man or woman who knows and knows that he knows.

I have repeated this story to give you a flavour of the kind of speeches my father would make. But also for the lessons of the story itself. Do enjoy and cherish your school days at SXI, as they are the foundation that builds your knowledge and character. It also teaches you how to form human relationships based on friendship, kindness, solidarity and idealism.

You will find later in life that youth and student days are the best times of your life, for you are able to express your ideals in a free space with school friends who are equally searching for the truth.

Later on, when you join the adult world, you will find temptations and pressures to take part in the rat race where the values are different. Where the main criteria of success will be how high is your salary, how powerful is your car, and how big is your house.

In my own experience, St Xaviers, the teachers and fellow students, the activities we were engaged in, the many talks we had in the school canteen, and under the trees, and in the coffee shops, all these taught me that there are more important things in life than materialism and the chase for money.

The values and passionate idealism that were infused into us as students gave us a knowledge of what is right and wrong, and a sense of duty of fighting against what is wrong and for what is right. Later on we called this “social justice”. This includes feeling that we cannot bear to see the wrongs done to others or to whole societies, and do nothing about it. A motivation to join with others to take action, however small or insignificant it may seem at first. We had a motto then in one of the clubs in SXI: See, Judge and Act. The process of doing this when I was a student, became the foundation on which I based subsequent activities and choice of jobs in my later life.

My student days, first in SXI, then in other institutions, taught me a few things. Firstly, that the secret of happiness or fulfilment in life comprises the quest for knowledge and truth, the cultivation of fulfilling and loving human relations, fighting for social justice, and living in harmony with your fellow human beings, with the environment, with your spiritual God, and with yourself.

Secondly, that there are two types of wealth: material wealth and inner wealth. Material well being is important: that we have enough food, water, shelter, clothing, health care. But basing the motivation of our life on acquiring more and more things that we do not need but are only there as status symbols, will not give you fulfilment. It may even distort your personality and lead you away

from the secret of happiness. For fulfilment, we need to build our inner wealth: knowledge, friendships, love, the sense of social justice.

Thirdly, as students we collected many good sayings. One of my favourite ones is this quote from Gandhi: Live simply so that others may simply live. It is such a simple saying, but it is so profound. Our world is so unequal. Where a few percent of the population have so much wealth that they can spend it on a luxury yacht, expensive handbags and shoes, and diamond necklaces. While a big part of the population do not have a proper roof over their heads, there is no clean water or a toilet, not enough food, and no medicines when their children or grandparents fall sick. And meanwhile, the world's environment is suffering from over consumption of resources, pollution, logging of forests and hills, and floods. We in Penang suffer from floods caused by logging and landslides from over development especially in the hills. So it is really important to live simply, so that the Earth and environment can be sustained, so that others in this country and in this world can simply live.

Thank you for your patience in listening to me. I hope I gave you some reasons to appreciate our great school, SXI, and our teachers and fellow students. Enjoy your school days for they will never be there again. And enjoy your life, with the values and lessons that St Xavier's has given you.