

We have seen the old year out. We have welcomed in the New Year, 2021, Reiwa 3. It is the 81<sup>st</sup> year of our school. This year is supposed to be an Olympic year. I know many of you look forward to watching exciting matches, thrilling races, and excellent performances. However, many of you have been wondering whether the Games will be held or not due to the surges in COVID-19. Nobody knows for sure, but I do hope the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games this year, in the year of 2021, will be held and will be successful.

During this winter vacation, you have been busy doing many things, especially the twelfth graders, who are preparing for the New University Examination. You have probably had enough time for enjoying good food or having a good time with your friends and families. We have been forced to accept so called new ways of living. Be patient. Please concentrate on your studies for a bit more. This year, I visited Anamori-Inari Shrine, which is close to Haneda Airport, as I have done for almost four decades, but I didn't ask them for a new amulet since I didn't want to get close to anyone there. I also went to Aso Shrine, which is near my home and looked after by just one priest alone. I asked him for an amulet, and I prayed that the twelfth graders might achieve their dreams. I prayed that other students would enjoy their school lives. And I also prayed that none of you get infected with the notorious virus.

Everyone, I would like to talk about two things today at the starting point of the third trimester.

First, in an age of uncertainty, it is essential for everyone to keep on learning. I want you to be life-long learners. What you learn at school may be outdated within a decade or so. That's why recurrent education is regarded as being very important. I hope you will continue to learn, with high aims of making our society better through your lives. I don't think it is right that you stop learning after graduating from a high school or university. Learning always offers sufficient stimulation to your curiosity, which may help you change your lives for the better, and our society for the better. I hope you will be able to have fun learning new things. You should accept as many new things as you can. Don't shun them. I hope you will always enjoy changes. You may have many more chances to leave your marks and achievements in this age of uncertainty rather than in an age of an unchanging and unchanged society. I do hope you will come to make important contributions to our society.

Second, and last, since the government has lowered the voting age, some of you will have a chance to vote in the House of Representatives election this year. I hope all of you who will have gained the right to vote will go to the polls. Voting is one of the most important rights guaranteed to us under the Constitution, and it is also a civic duty. I have a great interest in the voting rate among the young, ages 18 and 19. The House of Representatives election will be a very good chance for you to think about some of the political issues we face in our society today. I think we should all take an interest in political issues in order to try to help make our society better. It is essential for you to have critical ways of thinking; to compare campaign promises, and to learn about candidates and their political parties. It is you who can change the world.

Today I have spoken about two things: first, that you should become life-long learners, and, second, that you should take an interest in political issues.

One last thing to the twelfth graders, who are going to take New University Examination within two weeks. Believe in yourselves. I'm sure you will be able to make it. Don't be afraid to set high goals for yourselves. The possibilities for you are infinite. Aim high!

In closing my speech, as I have told you many times, I hope all of you are gentle and kind to one another, not ignoring your friends, and not speaking ill of them. Every student deserves respect. And as I have told you many times, it takes only a moment to destroy a good relationship, but it takes very long time to become reconciled with one another. Help each other. Respect your friends. And work together toward achieving your dreams. There is always hope to be found in the hardships of life. Ad alta!

Thank you very much.

794 words