

74th Commencement Tuesday, March 15th, 2022

Three years have passed since you began your studies at this highly selective and historically important Metropolitan High School. There must be countless things that have concerned and interested you during these years.

Three years ago, all of you were still junior high school students. And now you are already soon-to-be adults who have, to some extent, gained intellectual strength, judgment, and powers of expression. That makes me very happy. Actually, after April 1st you will be legally adults since the amended Civil Code will be implemented. You'll have gained the right to do many things, and at the same time you'll be responsible for how you'll behave as adults. Even though it may be difficult for most of you to be independent economically from your guardians, however, you should be independent as young adults and be responsible for the principles by which you live.

Most of you already have the right to vote. There will be a House of Councilors election in July. Go to the polls, everyone. You will be young adults soon, and that means you ought to be able to show individual responsibility. I do hope you become highly responsible adults whose moderation in behavior will be an excellent model for others. And I do hope you will come to make important contributions to our society.

There have been many things that have seemed especially noteworthy during these past three years.

In 2019, we suffered from a continuing series of natural disasters, including Typhoon Hagibis, which caused many floods and took the lives of more than 90 people. In October, Okinawa's symbol, Shuri Castle, burnt down. Fortunately, we have also witnessed a number of very good things, one of which was the visit by Pope Francis to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Another good thing was the enthronement ceremony of His Majesty, Emperor Naruhito. A new era began. In December, when the Opening Ceremony for the New National Stadium was held, we attended together with you, our 74th graduation class. I am still basking in the afterglow.

In 2020, in January, I attended, by invitation, the *Utakai hajime* (Annual New Year's Poetry Reading) in the Pine Room of the Imperial Palace. In the same month, I was commended for contributions as a teacher by the Minister of Education and was

granted, with others, an audience with Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako. This was only possible because I was the principal of Aoyama High School, and it gave me great happiness.

Then, in March, the government declared a state of emergency. We were forced to lockdown our school for nearly three months. We had to cancel or postpone our school trips, the Sports Day, the *Gaien-sai* Festival, and the 80th Anniversary Ceremony. These unfortunate reversals have been especially disappointing to you, your guardians, and my fellow teachers. Since then, we have also had to go through five further state of emergency periods.

In 2021, the vaccinations started in March. Now nearly 80% of us are fully vaccinated, and about 30% of us have been booster vaccinated. But we had to hold the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games without ordinary audiences in the summer. Even though the stadium is in hailing distance from us, we could only watch the Blue Impulse jetfighters flying over our school. Some good news, however, made us happy, such that Japan won 58 medals in the Olympic Games, in which many young athletes attracted interest and achieved good results, that Shohei Ohtani appeared in the MLB All-Star Game and was named the MLB's MVP, that Sōta Fujii won four Shōgi titles, and last month he gained a fifth title, and that Dr. Syukuro Manabe won the Nobel Prize in Physics. He pioneered research on climate change.

And this year, we have been experiencing a new surge of infections due to the Omicron variant, a new mutant strain of coronavirus that has begun to mutate into a new variant, BA-2. North Korea has launched missiles several times. Russia has invaded Ukraine, which I still can't believe. This invasion is irrational and illegal, however, and that has made us understand that no war is motivated by logical thinking, but brought on by insanity and madness, hatred and anger.

It is hard to imagine how our society might change in the next ten years. That's why you all should be lifelong learners. I think we learn because we want to be happier. And to stop learning means to stop becoming happier. If you stop learning, you will not be able to adapt yourself to changes in our society. If you can't be happy yourself, you won't be able to make our society better. Albert Einstein said, "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything." Protecting ourselves from COVID-19 infection while maintaining socio-economic activities has certainly been far from easy. But we must keep on moving forward. And you should remember that there will be many chances to leave your marks

and to make achievements that will change our society for the better in this age of uncertainty.

Some of you will begin studies at a university and others will prepare for another try for admission next year. You may feel depressed to discover that some people you meet are better than you in certain fields. But communicating with those people will help you mature and make you stronger and wiser. Working together creates strength.

Japan has little in the way of natural resources. Our nation's greatest treasure is its citizenry. You are part of that great treasure. Each of you is irreplaceable. Believe in yourselves. The possibilities for you are infinite. *Ad alta*. Aim high, everyone!

Thank you very much. 954 words