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Feast Day 2015

Celebrating One Hundred Years of Faith

Friday 13th February saw our annual celebration of Feast Day. During the years the religious community resided here it was a celebration of Reverend Mother's Feast Day, and is now celebrated as the School's Feast Day. Founded in 1634 in France and arriving in England in 1911, in September this year we mark One Hundred Years of Faith, the centenary of St Augustine's Priory's establishment on the Hillcrest Road site. The year will be filled with occasions of celebration to mark this event.

Feast Day always begins in the morning with the 'Wishing', a coming together of the whole school community when we hear reports from the Captains and Vice-Captains of the four school Houses: St Gabriel, St Michael, St Raphael and St George.

The House Captains eloquently spoke of the qualities of their House patrons, qualities and values which we strive to develop as Augustinians.

St Gabriel's Captain, Kajal Bal, told us of her pride at being St Gabriel's House Captain and went on to say,

'Gabriel means "God is my strength"... In our House we believe in drawing out the best in one another, through St Gabriel, our archangel of revelation... St Gabriel is here for us to help clear away confusion and achieve the wisdom we need to make decisions and obtain the confidence we need to act on those decisions. St Gabriel can help us to express our truth openly and honestly... He is the patron saint of small children and he looks after and nourishes the child in each of us, a child who may be arrested in growth or wounded and in need of love... His guiding hand is always there to protect what is pure within us. He lights the way to the truth within our hearts, and helps us to see what is the right path for us to follow for our highest good and greatest joy.'

Megan O'Flynn, Captain of St Michael's House told us that 'St Michael is known as the protector against evil, a healer ... As a house we look out for one another, we make sure that we are there to support our friends in times of need, and we have the courage to go on despite any doubts we may have.'

In artworks St Michael is portrayed carrying a sword, a sword of courage. We may have not won some inter-House events, we may have not always won Sports Day but as a House we always strive to do the best we can, not to fulfil someone else's expectations, but to fulfil our own. Now as the exam season begins to catch up with most of us in the senior years, particularly those taking GCSEs and fellow Sixth Formers taking A Levels, we can use the courage and strength we have in our House to get through these examinations. We wish those taking exams the best of luck and to remember that we can do the best we can. Now let's begin Feast Day with courage and determination in our hearts and work together as a team to achieve our goals.'

Billie Morrison, Captain of St George, shared this with us, 'St George was brave. But what does that mean? What does it really mean to be brave? Going to war? Fighting an illness? Standing up for what you believe in; your religion? Your family? Your friends?

Or can it be as simple as speaking to a girl who is sitting on her own?

St George is recognized for being brave, courageous, the epitome of strength and heroism. But what can we do, as young women, to be brave?

Is it brave to tell your friend that she is doing something foolish on Facebook?

Is it brave to attempt to shoot a goal in a netball match?

Is it brave to ask a teacher for help?

In St George's House we encourage and value every act of bravery, no matter how small.

We all have our own dragons to fight. They are not always 20 feet tall fire-breathing reptiles. Dragons come in all shapes and sizes. They are people. They are exams. They are ideas. And no matter what shape a dragon takes, they can all be overcome with a little bit of bravery.'

The House Vice-Captains went on to tell us of the achievements of the Houses over the past year and the charities for which each House will raise money during the forthcoming Charities' Week. For example, Jasleen Deu of St Gabriel, spoke of her House's achievements: 'In 2014 St Gabriel's won Sports Day through excellent team work, energy, hard work and enthusiasm. We have also demonstrated our superb skills in sports through achieving the highest score in inter-House netball this year. Let's carry on this amazing performance and win Feast Day!' (Following the Wishing the Sixth Form organises activities for the school for which marks are awarded on a House basis).

After the speeches there followed the presentation of the Catherine Aylward Award, named after a former pupil of this school. It is given to girls for being 'the best that they can be', living life to the best of their abilities. Qualities which Catherine demonstrated when faced with adversity. This year's recipients of the award were Sennen Powell, Upper IIA, and Victoria Lohead, Upper VA. Many congratulations to both girls on receiving this award.

After the 'Wishing', the speeches, the presentations and the morning of organised games and activities we celebrated the centre of Feast Day, the Mass at Ealing Abbey at which all girls, from Prep I to Upper VI and staff join together in a festival of community and thanksgiving for our school and its members, past and present.

The Abbot of Ealing, Fr Martin Shipperlee, once again welcomed us to celebrate our Feast Day Mass at Ealing Abbey and Fr Peter Burns joyfully celebrated Mass, delivering a thoughtful homily on our patron saint, St Augustine of Hippo and his values and their relevance for us today.

To conclude the proceedings, our Headteacher, Mrs Raffray, wished us all a happy and restful Half Term and announced the results of the Feast Day activities. A tightly fought contest, but St Gabriel's House won the day!

Words from the second reading in Mass, from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians, remind us of the faith the first community of our school demonstrated when it was founded nearly three hundred years ago and which has been the cornerstone of our community ever since:

'Because it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith; not by anything of your own, but by a gift from God; not by anything that you have done, so that nobody can claim the credit. We are God's work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life.'

Photographs courtesy of Kiranjeet Sandhu, Upper VI, and Aneae Rodriguez, Upper VA.