

**THE WORD ALIVE:
TOGETHER AS STARS, HARBINGERS AND WARRIORS
OF ONE USC FOR THE COUNTRY, FOR THE WORLD,
FOR THE FUTURE, AND FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD**

GREETINGS

To our beloved Prelate *Archbishop Jose S. Palma*, Board of Trustees of the University of San Carlos, Chaired by Dr. *Carmelita Quebengco* and represented here by *Mr. Jose R. Soberano III*, president and CEO of Cebu Landmasters, Provincial Superior of SVD Southern Province Fr. Rogelio N. Bag-ao, *Dr. Salustiano T. Jimenez*, DepEd Region 7 Director and *Dr. Maximo C. Aljibe*, Director of CHED Region 7, members of USC Cabinet, industry partners, community collaborators, my family (a few of them managed to come over), SVD confreres, and most of all, dear Carolinians—students, parents, deans, chairs, BED Director and Principals, faculty and staff, and alumni, friends and everyone else who is here and those online, good afternoon! How are you today? In Kiswahili we say, “Habari ya leo?”

I am truly humbled and honored by your presence and support. That we are finally able to hold this ceremony after months of delay is no ordinary accomplishment. And so we thank the organizing committee and everyone else for their hard work. We also thank the front-liners out there for their service and sacrifice to keep us safe and protected. Can we give them all a big round of applause, please?

TOGETHER

You might be aware that this investiture was originally slated to be held last August. It did not happen that way, for I assumed office last June in a low-key ceremony. Now, about five months later, we are holding this investiture to more formally and more publicly install me into the Office of the President of USC.

Kindly allow me to talk a little about the symbolism of installation and of course investiture. Installation connotes occupying a space, taking up an office or a seat of position. Investiture, on the other hand, signifies putting on a vestment or clothing. ‘To be invested’ or ‘to be vested with’, therefore, is to be bestowed with something, which could mean acquiring a new persona and be transformed—a phenomenon that could be comparable, but certainly not exactly the same, to the transfiguration experience of Jesus when his clothes became dazzling white as God the Father declared, “This is my beloved Son on whom my favor rests. Listen to Him!”

This investiture, thus, is not about one person. As a ritual, it is communal validation of an office that exists, not for its own sake, but for the sake of those for whom the office was created in the first place. The investiture underlines the transformation of the person together with those for whom the office exists. This investiture thus is meant to strengthen our communal bond, inspire trust and confidence in each one, and find another reason why need to be together.

STARS

My academic background is on philosophy, theology, and communication. Philosophy taught me how to think and why it matters. Theology taught me who thinks of me and why I matter. Communication, on the other hand, reminded me that other people also think and why it matters that we think together.

I would say that this is an important aspect of a University—thinking together, researching together, discovering together, learning together. After all, a university is a universe, a constellation of stars—stars

we call researchers, teachers, students, and staff. A university is a tapestry of individuals, young and old, beautiful and very beautiful, talented and extra talented, learned and the one who is learned, and so on and so forth. A university, thus, is a star-studded place, where everyone shines or must shine, where every star is shining with another star, thereby making the world brighter and better.

Hence, as a University, USC is no place for lackluster commitment, no place for mediocrity. Working and studying in one of the top universities in the country, Carolinians are expected to shine, and radiate a brightness that he/she alone can make. No point of sitting on the laurels of the achievements of other Carolinians, because those things are already part of the past. To the extent that they could inspire and motivate us, they are good. Beyond that, we need to make new paths, explore new horizons, soar higher, achieve more. Of course, quality and excellence can be a very tall order for us, given the context of the moment, and given that the pandemic is still very much a threat to our existence and well-being. But just the same, a flickering candle shines bright in the dark.

HARBINGER

The last line of the first verse or stanza of the USC Hymn talks about learning as a 'harbinger' [To USC we sing our song shall always ring; You, who set the mind astir of our learning be harbinger].

A harbinger is someone who or something that announces the arrival of another. It is a precursor, a forerunner, a John the Baptist. As a learning institution, USC should prepare students for what is to come. But the future is always tricky to discern, more so now because of the pandemic. In fact, figuring out the future these days can be more problematic because of so much fear and uncertainty.

About two weeks ago, I attended a webinar on laughter or "Laughing Out Loud" organized by the ADEANS, and it was not at all a laughable experience for me; I mean, it was humbling. I realized that in order to belt out a good laughter, you don't have to laugh at someone, you just need someone to laugh with. Hearing the laughter of others during that webinar, I ended up laughing more.

My vision for USC for the current term is to strengthen our togetherness, enrich our universe by having more stars around, and allowing more of us to shine even in the dark, especially now in this darkest night of the pandemic. But nobody can do that for us, Carolinians. No one can shine on our behalf; we have to do it ourselves. We have to step forward, and we have to do it together because a cluster of candles is much brighter and more vibrant than a lonesome one.

The recipient of Nobel Peace Prize this year (2020) is the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). Interesting because such conferment of award is not only a recognition of WFP's remarkable achievement, but also a global confirmation that food is not just for nutrition or nourishment. It is a political tool and a weapon, for it has the power to divide and unite communities, to cause war or promote peace. Food security is a classic example of an issue that should to be addressed together—politically, socially, culturally, economically, and technologically.

There's a saying in Kenya which says: "Mtu ni watu." Nobody is an individual. Every classmate, student, teacher, colleague, neighbor, friend, stranger is a family, a communion. Nobody came into this world on his/her own. Your parents, too, and their parents did not magically appear in this world. Every one of us is a community. We are all hardwired for togetherness, for solidarity, for communion.

The 14th General Chapter of the SVD in 1994 speaks of the Mission at the Service of Communion. The 2018 SVD General Chapter, on the other hand, zeroes in on the Love of Christ that impels us. Pope Francis'

recent encyclical *'Fratelli tutti'* is subtitled as "On Fraternity and Social Friendship." In this document, the Pope argues that the world has failed to work together, not only in handling the COVID-19 crisis, but also in addressing issues like racism, immigration, poverty, war, etc. The Pope is thus calling for better politics, dialogue and friendship, renewed encounter, and for religions to promote peace and communion.

WARRIORS

It is no accident that USC athletes and varsity players are called 'Warriors', because Carolinians are built for war; it's in our DNA—not the violent and bloody type, but the more profound, enduring, life-enriching, and hope-fulling type.

You know, in the initial days of the pandemic here in Cebu, a group of USC faculty, staff, and alumni came together to produce disinfectants, sanitizers, face shields, face masks, and other supplies to be distributed to hospitals, health centers, police stations, LGU offices in the city and around the province, and beyond—to Bohol and Leyte. I had the privilege of being part of the transport team, together with our VP for Admin Fr. Jun Rebayla and then VP for Academics Fr. Aleks Gaut. On several occasions I met Carolinians in those places, and it was truly inspiring to see them stepping forward in the fight against the pandemic. I'm pretty sure a lot more Carolinians have done similar things or even greater things for people in need these days. Also during the USC Days celebration, another group of Carolinians went to Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) to deliver medical and other supplies to Persons Deprived of Liberty.

This is the Carolinian way, the USC Warrior's way—smart, brave, selfless. This is *scientia*, *virtus*, and *devotio* as a manifestation of being a witness to the Word, a product of an education with a mission. This the Word alive!

Before the Divine Word Missionaries took over the administration of this great institution in 1935, USC used to be a school for seminarians and lay students. In 1924, the seminary was separated, and Colegio de San Carlos became a school purely for lay students. And so before it became a university in 1948, USC already went through hundreds of turbulent years. It survived World War II and endured great upheavals and uncertainties. Long before the pandemic, USC was already tested countless of times, pummeled, and pounded. But it endured, survived, and thrived.

We want to survive, true. But in order to survive, we must thrive. Thriving is crucial for our survival. Survival is the least we can do, but mere survival can be also the most dangerous thing we can do. And so we must thrive, grow, nurture, nourish, learn. We need to become better people—more compassionate, generous, caring. We need to be smarter in *scientia*, braver in *virtus*, and more selfless in *devotio*. We need to develop new skills, new competencies, and new knowledge. We need education.

ONE USC

As I already said in other occasions, we are only as strong as our weakest link. The virus will attack us with no mercy if our immune system of togetherness is weak. The battle cry WE HEAL AS ONE should be premised on and preceded with WE LIVE AS ONE.

THE WORLD ALIVE

Friends and dear Carolinians, congratulations! This investiture is for you. Let us keep the Word alive in each one. Together, let us be stars, harbingers, and warriors of one USC, for the country, for the world, for the future, for the Kingdom of God.