Good morning Mr Morrison, staff, students, fellow 2018 graduates and guests

It is with great pleasure that I address you today as the 2018 Catherine McAuley Student of the Year recipient. I am truly honoured and blessed to have received such a prestigious award. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought I would be addressing you all today. Catherine McAuley is a woman who displayed compassion, selflessness, leadership and deep commitment to her faith. It is honestly a surreal feeling being able to speak about Catherine and how she has influenced me. During Year 11 I had the privilege of participating in the Young Mercy Leaders pilgrimage in Dublin. Here, the life and teachings of Catherine truly came to life and being able to walk in her footsteps brought me to a new understanding of the work she did. I had the opportunity to learn so much about issues in the world and this motivated me to return to the College and try to have a positive impact on others.

Throughout my time studying at Mount Lilydale Mercy College I learnt the power of community involvement and the opportunities that it may lead to. I can definitely say that my time wouldn’t have been as memorable if it wasn't for the ministry and service that I chose to participate in. Extra curricular activities not only provided me with a break from study but also enabled me to socialise with wide range of students and staff.

Since I have graduated, the question I often get asked is “Danielle, what was your experience like studying at Mount Lilydale Mercy College and did you achieve what you were aiming for?” My response is always the same. Mount Lilydale Mercy College is not just a high school, to me it’s a place where I feel I have been challenged yet I have achieved, grown and succeeded. Mount Lilydale has been my home and a place I feel accepted and welcomed. I have learnt about who I am as a person and my strengths and weaknesses.

The mercy spirit which is entrenched within the school community provided me with morals and values that I stand by today. The leadership skills I gained through my role as College Captain has given me the confidence to continue exploring issues, such as social justice. I continue to visit the refugees and asylum seekers at Broadmeadows Detention Centre and support them through their hardship.

My time at Mount Lilydale has inspired me to reach out into the community and help those in need. Through my experiences I have chosen to follow my passion by studying to be a paediatric nurse. Paediatric nurses provide health and medical care for children, while working with the family to address their concerns, fears and options. I will begin my studies next week at Australian Catholic University and am very excited to be entering this new phase of my life.

So my advice for all students at Mount Lilydale Mercy College is to work hard. It may seem simple on the surface, but the power of persistence and courage when studying is extraordinary. Never give up. No matter how many times you fall down, find the strength to keep trying because, I promise, with every failure there is a chance to grow. My third and final piece of advice is to go about your schooling with a sense of compassion, generosity and a positive outlook. So whatever you aspire to do, become or achieve, chase that dream and remember that you have amazing support from teachers, students, family and God.

Thank you once again for this opportunity and for everything that Mount Lilydale has helped me achieve. Mount Lilydale Mercy College will always hold a special place in my heart and I would like to thank everyone who has been a part of my journey here. May God bless each and every single one of you. Thank you.

Danielle Virgona