



“When asked to receive the Rey of Light Award, an award that will be given annually to many others, it struck me that it can best be received as a symbol celebrating gratitude for our Cristo Rey Mission in Atlanta.

A symbol is a mark or sign that is understood as representing an idea, object or relationships that allows us to go beyond what can be known or seen, beyond words or deeds, to a deeper meaning. It represents all our partnership efforts, our commitments to our mission and to those we serve. What we celebrate through our King of Hope is gratitude that we were asked to serve and we responded. Lets go back to our roots in order to appreciate the gift we have.

Fr. John Foley, the Jesuit founder of the first Cristo Rey school in Chicago twenty-one years ago, and the beginning of the Cristo Rey Network of schools, recently reflected on the historical foundation and the growth of Cristo Rey throughout the country. Our Atlanta history began with the seeds brought from Chicago about nine year ago. Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit's journey from then till now has similar dynamics and experiences as those Fr. Foley shared in his reflections. In sharing some excerpts from his thoughts, I think you will see the parallel to our journey and our Atlanta experiences too.

This whole Cristo Rey story continues to amaze us. It may well be that the Cristo Rey story is just beginning. So it's not a question of simply remembering all that God has done for us, but preparing for what the Cristo Rey story might be in the future. I keep waiting for the enthusiasm to wane, but it doesn't happen. I guess it just means that you can't corral God's grace.

Grace is alive and well among us. When we tell the Cristo Rey story we always emphasize that when we began this work, we didn't know what we were doing, I think that is really important to remember that. Recall what Sister Helen Prejean wrote: if it's not a surprise, if it's not scary, and if it's not an adventure, it's not a calling from Jesus!

When grace is part of the mix, all bets are off. It's a blessing and a privilege to be able to serve more and more deserving young people.

Tonight, this celebration, and what the Rey of Hope Award symbolizes, invites us to experience the depth of gratitude for the gifts we have been given, for our students, faculty, staff, Cooperate and University partners, religious sponsors, local and national Cristo Rey Boards, investors, and benefactors who believe in the power of this work and have chosen to act on those beliefs.

To close with Fr. Foley's thoughts: "God always surprises us and keeps life interesting. May we never tire of promoting the Kingdom, and may the world (and Atlanta) be a little more what God meant it to be because of our efforts!"

So, look around the room and to those next to you, and in the words of Yogi Berra, resounded by teammates, a full Yankee stadium, and gifts given to honor his accomplishments, took the mike and, in gratitude said: I want to thank every one who made this night necessary. And thank all of you too for making this celebration of gratitude necessary.”

J. Robert Fitzgerald, inaugural Rey of Light Awardee and founding Board Chair