

SPEECH BY CAV. FELICE MONTRONE OAM

Italian-Australian Community Commemorative Charity Lunch Sunday, 6 March 2016

Your Excellency Bishop Bosco Puthur; Fr Joshy Parapully OFM Cap., Spiritual leader of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund; Fr John Cooper OFM Cap., Official Historian of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund; Fr Domenico Cerasoli, Sydney Archdiocese Migrant Community Chaplain; Fr Adriano Pittarello, Scalabrini Father; Fr Ben Johnson OFM Cap of St Fiacre's Parish Church; Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Federal Minister for International Development and the Pacific; the Hon. Craig Laundy MP, Federal Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs; the Hon. Victor Dominello MP, NSW Minister for Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation; the Hon. Don Harwin MLC, President of the NSW Upper House; the Hon. Senator Francesco Giacobbe, Senator of the Italian Republic; Dr Arturo Arcano, Italian Consul General in Sydney; Dr Antonietta Baccanari, Director of Istituto Commercio Estero; the Hon. John Sidoti, NSW Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, Roads, Industry, Resources and Energy; the Hon. Guy Zangari, NSW Shadow Minister for Trade, Tourism and Major Events, Shadow Minister for Sport, Shadow Minister for Corrections, Shadow Minister for Emergency Services, and Shadow Minister for Veterans Affairs; Cr Darcy Byrne, Mayor of Leichhardt Council; Cr Angelo Tsirekas, Mayor of the City Canada Bay; Cr John Faker, Mayor of Burwood Council; Cr Michael Megna, City of Canada Bay; Cr Tony Fasanella, City of Canada Bay; Cr Tony Costantino, Leichhardt Council; Ms Gail O'Brien, Director of Chris O'Brien Lifehouse;

Dr Rohan Curnow, Academic Dean of the Catholic Institute of Sydney; Dr Annette Moxey, Alzheimer's Australia Dementia Research Foundation; Ms Christina Efthymiades, representing Prof. Judith Trotman and the Haematology Department of the Concord Cancer Centre; the Hon. Franca Arena AM; the Hon. Marie Ficarra; representatives of the Italian-Australian community associations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen – buongiorno.

I would like to convey to you how humbled, honoured and grateful the Board of Directors of the Father Atanasio Gonelli Charitable Fund and I, as Chairman, are to see each and every one of you joining us in celebrating the 26,000 days of apostolate to the Italian-Australian community by Father Atanasio Gonelli OFM Cap.

We have seen a short PowerPoint presentation of the impact Father Atanasio Gonelli has had on our community through his 62 years of work. We have also seen in the presentation, how our Charitable Fund has applied some of the funds you have donated.

Following the death of Fr Atanasio, on 26 February 2012, the past **Premier of NSW, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell** and **Minister Victor Dominello**, in inducting Father Atanasio Gonelli into the NSW Multicultural Hall of Fame, referred to Father Atanasio Gonelli as being an **inspiring hero** and a **great community and spiritual leader to whom everyone in NSW owes a great debt of gratitude.**

In September 2014, Leichhardt Council, under the leadership of Mayor Darcy Byrne who is with us here today, established a memorial garden on the Harbour Foreshore to honour the work of Father Atanasio Gonelli, the Capuchin Friars and the community they served.

In reading a book recently, I noticed the phrase, **“we only exist because people think of us”**. The participation of hundreds of community members at the Memorial Mass held on the 21st of February 2016, the beautiful historical presentation made by Father John Cooper at Palace Cinemas on the 23rd February 2016 about the life story of Father Atanasio and your participation in such a large number at this Commemorative Charity Lunch, is certainly a confirmation **that Father Atanasio continues to exist and that we are thinking of him.**

Our Board has kept faith with the commitment we made at last year’s Charity Lunch, by establishing the **young leaders of the future scholarship program**. To this effect, commencing 2015, we have granted a five year, \$5,000 per year research scholarship to the Catholic Institute of Sydney. We have here with us today, the Academic Dean of the Catholic Institute of Sydney, Dr Rohan Curnow.

The scholarships have the aim of supporting future young community leaders who have demonstrated qualities of leadership, initiative and willingness in their area of specialty and who are also involved in community affairs.

With your continuing support, we hope to continue the vision of Father Atanasio, whereby whenever he saw a need in the community, he always provided a solution.

Vi ringrazio per la vostra partecipazione e vi auguro una buona giornata. I wish to thank you for joining us here today.

Thank you for your generous donations and your continuing support.