



# UNIVERSITY OF SANTO TOMAS

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

## WALKING WITH CHRIST, WALKING WITH PURPOSE: A Reflection on the Thomasian Welcome Walk

**T**he Arch of the Centuries stands as one of the most iconic and enduring landmarks of the University of Santo Tomas (UST). Originally constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it once served as the main gateway of the University's original campus in Intramuros, founded in 1611 by **Archbishop Miguel de Benavides, OP**. In 1954, the war-damaged Arch was meticulously relocated and reconstructed—stone by stone—at its present site near the España Boulevard entrance of the Sampaloc campus. In 2010, the National Museum of the Philippines declared the Arch a *National Cultural Treasure*, along with other UST landmarks, recognizing their architectural and historical significance. Moreover, during the Quadricentennial celebration in 2011, the National Historical Commission of the Philippines designated UST as a *National Historical Landmark*.

More than a relic of the past, the Arch of the Centuries is a tangible legacy of UST's mission to form men and women of competence, commitment, and compassion. As its inscription declares, it is the "*Gateway to the history of the finest breed of Filipinos*"—a profound reminder that to be a Thomasian is to walk in the footsteps of history while forging paths toward a future of meaningful service. Adorning the lower façade are commemorative plaques honoring notable UST alumni: **Dr. José Rizal** (1861–1896) and **Pres. Manuel L. Quezon** (1878–1944). Along the Arch's rectangular top are panels depicting key moments in the life of **St. Thomas Aquinas**, above which rests the serene and regal image of the *Angelic Doctor*—philosopher, theologian, and patron of both the University and Catholic education.

Rooted in the Arch of the Centuries, the **Thomasian Welcome Walk** is a modern tradition that embodies UST's historical and cultural identity. Institutionalized in the early 2000s, it offers incoming freshmen a symbolic rite of passage, marking the beginning of their formation as Thomasians. Guided by academic staff and administrators, freshmen walk through the Arch—typically after the *Welcome Mass*—symbolizing their entry into the Thomasian journey. Years later, they will pass through it once more, this time after the *Baccalaureate Mass*, marking the culmination of their formation and their formal send-off to serve with faith, hope, and love.

"...While they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them..." (Lk 24:15). The *Road to Emmaus* offers a powerful perspective for understanding the significance of the **Thomasian Welcome Walk**. Like the two disciples on the road—confused and uncertain—new Thomasians begin their journey with questions, hopes, and expectations. But as they cross the Arch, they do not walk alone. **Jesus Christ walks with them**, often unseen, through their mentors, companions, and the life of the community. Just as the disciples' hearts burned within them as they listened to the Lord, may each Thomasian's heart be enkindled with zeal for truth, learning, and compassion. The Arch becomes their *Emmaus road*—a passage of encounter, formation, and spiritual purpose.

Pope St. John Paul II exhorted: "*Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!*" This moment is a communal and personal act of opening one's heart to faith, formation, and mission. The Church walks together as the People of God. In the **Thomasian Welcome Walk**, students journey in communion—not as isolated individuals, but as part of a listening, discerning, and accompanying community. Thus, the Welcome Walk becomes not only a ritual but also a reflection of the Church's path: *to walk with others, for others, and with Christ*.

The **Thomasian Welcome Walk** is a journey of grace. It begins at the Arch—but continues in every learning spaces, every act of love and service, and every decision grounded in faith. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Thomasians are called to walk from uncertainty to clarity, from isolation to communion, from searching to mission. With each step, the University affirms: to be Thomasian is to walk with purpose—shaped by memory, strengthened by community, and guided by Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

