

Maryvale Graduation 2021 (Virtual)

Dear brother and sisters in Christ

Dear friends

It is my great pleasure to address you on this wonderful occasion of the Maryvale Institute Graduation 2021. To each, and all of you, who have received awards today, I extend my sincere congratulations. I know that pride is a deadly sin, but perhaps, just for a while, you can enjoy a rightful sense of satisfaction. I'm sure that your families, your friends, and your lecturers are all very proud of you, as am I. So, well done.

The success we celebrate with you today will have come through dedication and sacrifice, perhaps with some challenging moments, writing assignments while burning the midnight oil. Now you know that it was all worth it. Your effort has been recognised and rewarded. And in this, we acknowledge too, with gratitude, the contribution of your tutors and supporters at Maryvale without whom your programmes of study would not have been possible.

Maryvale's aim is clear: 'to provide opportunities for lay people, clergy and religious to achieve a deeper understanding of the [Catholic] faith and to appreciate more clearly its joyful message for the lives of individuals and communities.' Grounded in faith, your academic achievement serves your own personal development. But it also equips you for your role in the mission of evangelisation and catechesis in service of the Church's mandate to teach all nations the saving truth of Christ. The Church needs you. Your dioceses and parishes need you. The Lord needs you - to help others know Him, love Him and serve Him.

We are steeped in that theological methodology highlighted by St Anselm of Canterbury. Our study, like his, is that of *fides quaerens intellectum* - faith seeking understanding. Like St Anselm, each of us can say *credo ut intelligam* - I believe so that I may understand. The search for truth, and the desire for deepened understanding, is not alien to the Catholic tradition. Our intellectual

exploration is a response, through faith, to God's self-revelation. It involves exploring the act of faith, by which we believe, and the content of faith in which we believe. To believe within the Church also means to believe with the Church.

Dear friends, never cease to be fascinated by the truths of our Catholic faith. Continue to expand your knowledge and love of the Church's teaching. Today we honour the hard work which enabled you to complete your studies. But remember, the journey does not stop here. Remember too, that in the Catholic tradition the knowledge and love of our faith grows through time spent in the classroom and the library and, importantly, through time spent in prayer and contemplation.

The Church invites you to continue growing as passionate and articulate advocates for Christ and His Gospel. The Church needs you to know and love the Scriptures and the Catechism. The Church's ministry of evangelisation and catechesis depends on your ongoing formation as evangelisers and catechists.

Shortly after taking up my first appointment as an assistant priest at St Joseph's in Pontefract - which is in my beloved Yorkshire in case anyone doesn't know - I was invited into a local primary school to address a class of young children. They were learning about baptism and so, equipped with the presbytery washing up bowl and a doll borrowed from Mothers and Toddlers, I set out trying to explain the significance of this first Sacrament of Initiation.

When it came to pouring water on the doll's head, I stopped and asked the children if they could finish the phrase '*I baptise you in the name of...*' After a pause, a little girl put her hand up and completed the sentence with '*the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Catholic Church.*' It wasn't quite the answer I was looking for, but somewhere in her mind she had rightly made the connection between baptism and belonging. She had grasped that this new beginning brought with it participation in the Church, the community of believers.

In your own way, I hope that one of the fruits of you completing your studies is a new participation in Church's life. Each of us needs to do everything we can to teach, strengthen, and nurture Catholic faith at every stage of life. Our Holy Father Pope Francis has asked us through the Synod to reflection on themes of communion, participation and mission. To put it simply: What does it mean for us to belong to Christ and be in relationship with His Church? What does it mean for us to be engaged and involved with Christ in His Church? What does it mean for us to be sent out, in proclamation and service, by Christ and His Church? How vital to helping people answer these questions is the formation of disciples, families, teachers, catechists and evangelists.

The Second Vatican Council invited a renewed appreciation of our baptismal vocation to holiness, service and mission. United to the Lord Jesus in His saving death and triumphant resurrection, each baptised person is clothed with Christ and shares the commission to make disciples. Through water and the Holy Spirit, we each become 'another Christ,' called to proclaim the Good News of God's love for all people.

We are familiar with St. Paul's description of the Church as Christ's Body, with each particular part having a unique and special function, and with all parts necessary for the health and growth of the whole. This remains a powerful model for understanding the Church today as we journey on the way together.

In a world and society that often lives as if God does not exist, we want to find ways in which all members of the Church can contribute to making Christ known. For some this may seem daunting, even threatening. It might mean seeing parish communities in a new light, discovering or rediscovering the part everyone can play in the Church's mission. Spreading the Gospel has never been the sole responsibility of bishops, priests, and religious, even if sometimes we have thought and behaved as if it were. The Church is always all of us. Baptised into Christ, the Lord calls each of us to work in His vineyard, according to our vocation and gifts, so that the harvest may indeed be rich.

How then might we step forward on the foundation of the achievements we have made? Perhaps four simple pointers can help:

First, we continue to seek holiness - This means rooting everything in a personal relationship with Christ, in and through His Church, founded on prayer and the scriptures, and nourished by the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

Second, we commit ourselves to new ways, or a new dedication, to making Christ known and present in the world - In a special way, the baptised lay faithful are called to witness to the Gospel in everyday life - at work, at school, at home, with colleagues, strangers, family, and friends. Through contact with people who would never darken the doors of a church, lay people can offer the words, actions, and face of Christ to a waiting world, to people who might never cross the physical threshold of the Church's door.

Third, to grow as the domestic Church - Whether married or single, we are called to make our homes places where Christ's Gospel is loved and shared; place of hospitality for growth in faith.

Finally, we are to actively participate in the Church's life - All those baptised into Christ properly exercise their baptismal vocation by assisting with the celebration of the liturgy and the Sacraments, by spreading and teaching the faith, formally or informally, as evangelists and catechists, by helping to administer the Church's resources, and by upholding the dignity of human life, justice and peace, and the service of the weakest and the poorest.

Dear friends, let your achievements encourage you onwards. You are called to greatness in witness to Christ and in playing your part in the mission to be salt to earth and light to the world. The Church is always all of us, together in Christ. May God bless you and keep you. Amen.

+ John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark