

Maryvale Miracles
Graduation address by Professor Simon Lee
St Chad's Cathedral, 7 November 2019

1 Congratulations to all our graduands, both those in the cathedral today and those around the world who cannot be here in person but who graduate in absentia.

2 Thank you to all our graduands' supporters, families, friends, teachers, staff, associate staff, the Sisters at Maryvale, the trustees, Archdiocese, partner institutions, parishes dioceses, bishops' conferences and others.

3 This is the occasion when, traditionally, the director or rector or vice-chancellor or principal of an institution explains what the student experience has all been about. Isn't this a bit late? No, for this is not the end. Some of you return, as some of you graduating today have already shown. Some will help Maryvale by recruiting the next wave of students as, for instance, the long list of students from Singapore can be attributed in large measure to the enthusiasm of a Maryvale Masters alumna. But I mean more even than these ways in which this is not the end. Your certificate, rightly prized, is not the end, as I shall shortly endeavour to explain. But why am I in this role today? The director throughout your studies, Fr Eddie Clare, has just completed his time at Maryvale. So I have been brought off the substitutes' bench. I was sitting there, as a trustee, last year, at the right hand of Fr Michael Cullinan, although I note that I have been cut off the photo I see everywhere at Maryvale of that occasion. Substitutes sometimes struggle, as England found to their cost in the rugby world cup final on Saturday. But sometimes, they can help you to your best performance as Kevin demonstrated later on Saturday as a substitute professional, replacing Neil, partnering Alex in Strictly Come Dancing.

4 What a time to graduate from Maryvale! No sooner had you finished your final assignment, chapter, exam, than the person who gave Maryvale its name, Saint John Henry Newman, was canonised. Maryvale was his first Catholic home. It was a place of tranquillity for him and his little group at a time of change, of transition, of reflection. So it can be for others, as you have experienced. Every Maryvale graduand will know that Saint John Henry Newman famously called for an educated laity. You may know that he described a university as an *alma mater*, a nourishing mother, who knows her children one by one. He said that holiness is unseen, in your hearts, how you go about your duty. Saint John Henry Newman knew that for each of us there is some definite service assigned to us and no other, we can be a link in a chain, a bond in a community. And one of Newman's great gifts to graduating students is that he was a genius who took two degrees simultaneously but who didn't get a good degree, in either subject. Admittedly, in his case it was because of over-work, rather than the opposite condition which explains some disappointing results. But he was not shackled by his poor performance in undergraduate exams and not restricted to his two subjects of Mathematics and Classics. His contributions to theology and to literature, for example, are innumerable.

5 Your contributions to life and to one another make a difference and my message at graduations is that you go out with more than a certificate: that the deeper, the more profound, the longer lasting the influences on you from your student experiences turn out to be, the less likely you are to have noticed them at the time they happened.

6 You are especially blessed to graduate as dual citizens: Maryvale and your diocese, for instance, Bamenda and other Cameroon dioceses, Maryvale and the Open University, Maryvale and Liverpool Hope University, Maryvale, Notre Dame in Paris and the Scottish bishops' conference diaconate programme. The influences might come from either partner institution and you might be a link between them. For instance, when I went to Aberdeen last

month for Maryvale, our host was Deacon Tony Schmitz who first took a degree at Maryvale in 1995, way before he returned for diaconate studies and now to guide students in that programme. He has helped the Church elsewhere in the world adapt the Maryvale partnership model for their programmes, for instance helping the now retired Lithuanian Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius, who was in September made a Cardinal in retirement, at roughly the same age as Saint John Henry Newman was recognised by Pope Leo XIII. When the Lithuanian Cardinal was sent by the state in communist times to a Siberian labour camp, the work of the underground Chronicle which he published and had founded was carried on by Sisters and lay people, including Dr Birute Briliute, director of our Maryvale Postgraduate Research Programme. Maryvale's influence, and your influence, ripples out across the world, helping the church in need and is inspired by it. The extraordinary challenges of church life in Bamenda, for example, are met in part through partnership with Maryvale. My own father, who died last year, has left two bequests to the church, one to the parish in Kent where he and my mother are buried and one, of all places in the world, to Bamenda, where my sister has visited and which has sent priests to minister to people like my father in parishes in Portsmouth diocese.

7 When I was a student in my undergraduate college, next door to Newman's, but a little bit after his time, in the late 1970s, we too had a gifted mathematician. His name is Fr Michael Cullinan, now the director of the Bachelor of Divinity course at Maryvale. We had an abundance of distinguished historians, from the Master of the College, Christopher Hill, to one of my peers, who went on to become the Bursar-General and then the Secretary-General of the worldwide Carmelites, and who is now the Prior Provincial of the Carmelites here, and an associate member of the Maryvale staff team, also in the cathedral today, Fr Kevin Alban.

8 I met a law student from another college when she was visiting ours and when we were each invited to the Catholic chaplaincy for lunch. When I went off to study abroad, I lent her my Roman law notes and when I returned, I went to the law library in the hope that she was there, not only to reclaim the notes. We have been married for 37 years and Patricia McNulty, as she was then, now Patricia Lee, is also in the cathedral today. I am not saying that you will know people who become priests or whom you marry but a chance encounter during your studies at Maryvale will turn out to be significant in your lives.

9 It is not just encounters with *people* that make a hidden, unrecognised, difference but every encounter with *ideas*. For instance, my first year undergraduate exams were taken just before Easter. In the days running up to those exams, the University and the churches chose this most inconvenient of times to run an ecumenical Christian mission in the Sheldonian Theatre. Night after night, I went along, when I might have been revising. Cardinal Suenens talked about hope. A couple of decades later, when I was involved at community grassroots level in the peace process in Northern Ireland, I remembered one of his sayings about hope: 'To hope is not to dream but to turn dreams into reality'. I was then appointed to become the rector of a merged ecumenical institute in Liverpool, which had been struggling to come up with a name for 20 years. It still had its holding title: S Katherine's, Christ's and Notre Dame Colleges – the Liverpool Institute of Higher Education. I suggested condensing that into the word 'Hope'.

10 In the decades to come, you too will recall insights from student life beyond your coursework. Maryvale is a blessed place but ultimately it is more of an *idea*: a Maryvale Miracle can happen in Bamenda, in Lithuania or anywhere. Maryvale is above all a nourishing mother; one by one, we will not forget you, however you performed in your final assessments, but your alma mater will love you as her own children. This is not reserved for those whose unseen holiness is recognised 200 years later through canonisation. It is a guarantee that you will take Maryvale with you in ways as yet unknown. We do not worry exactly how: 'I do not ask to see the distance scene. One step enough for me.' Saint John Henry Newman, pray for us.