

Eminent Chancellor, members of the platform party, distinguished guests, graduates, and those relatives and friends of Newman who are joining us via the livestream.

A few years ago, I teased my daughter, challenging her to write my Christology exam for me. The question I was working on was about the purpose of Jesus' ministry, his preaching on truth and morals, and whether as Christians we must accept those truths and live as Jesus told us we must. 9 years old at the time, she surprised me by accepting my challenge and proceeded to write a 2-page typed response. Since she had done the work, it was only fitting that I sent her answer to my professor and the response I received was this: "Very impressive. We'll have to get her on the Newman faculty. Give her a hug for me." A simple response from a beloved professor, Fr. Don McDonald. Just a few words, yet words which continue to be a source of pride and encouragement, a seed planted in a young child so faithful, yet also seeking to understand her God.

Why do I lead with this short yet personal story? As I was preparing this speech, I was impressed with the variety of approaches Valedictorians had taken to represent their fellow classmates. Impressed and maybe also a bit intimidated. I wanted to present something unique, but my fear was that in writing on behalf of this group of amazing and dedicated

individuals, in attempting to consolidate the distinctive and highly personal journeys these graduates of NTC have taken, I would in some way lose the essence of what makes each of their experiences important and worthy of celebration. These graduates represent not just a collective, a graduating class of diploma and degree recipients, but more importantly before me are 38 individuals and behind them the countless others who have supported their faith seeking understanding. They are a visible representation of many invisible successes and failures, late nights, tears of frustration, joy and laughter, missed family events, papers and more papers, exams and forum posts, support networks, and sacrifices. Their stories matter. Just as each experience at NTC is different, so too are the motivations for undertaking these studies. Whether it be to teach about our Lord in the schools or to our own children, for personal interest, to work in ministry, or as part of the path towards ordination, the beautiful thing about the nature of our studies here at NTC is that regardless the experience or the motivation it is all oriented towards one thing, Jesus Christ. As in the final exam question I opened with, we have been invited to study our Lord, to fall in love with him and then take that love and to share it in our Christian life. And so my fellow graduates, now that we have learned, it is our time to act. St. John Henry Newman wrote: "God has created me to do him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not

committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons”.

That bond of connection between persons isn't just between the graduates either. While preparing this speech, I prayed that I could adequately thank the tireless efforts of the faculty and staff. Rather than being distant and aloof dispensers of wisdom, they have instead been fellow pilgrims, demonstrating the intensely personal nature of the relationship between student and teacher, especially when the object of instruction is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Just as each and every one of our successes and failures is important to Him, He who has counted the very hairs of our head (cf. Luke 12:7), so too has our success been important to the faculty and staff of this learned institution.

And finally, on behalf of this graduating class, I wish to thank all our family, friends, colleagues, church communities, everyone who has invested time to support and pray for us, the many who have sacrificed for us, all so that we could celebrate this day. How can we truly convey our gratitude and honor the gift we have received in this noble pursuit of faith seeking understanding? Paraphrasing Micah Chapter 6 verse 8, a favourite of the late Mrs. Joan Carr, we can offer thanks by acting justly, loving faithfully, and walking humbly with our God.

Fellow graduates, it is my honour to speak on your behalf today, to recognize our achievements and give thanks for those who have helped us get here. As St. Paul told the Corinthians, “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus” (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:4). I led with the story of my daughter because despite this being an intensely personal journey of discovering our Lord, and despite the support we have received from so many, what we have received here must be shared. Quoting St. Paul again, this time in his letter to the Colossians: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (cf. Colossians 4:5-6). My humble prayer is that we may take this gift of deeper knowledge, of a more intimate relationship with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and witness to it in a world that needs Him now more than ever. Amen.