It is an honour of being asked to be the speaker at your convocation ceremony. It is either by design or coincidence that this memorable and important event in your lives falls on the 50th anniversary of Pope John the XXIII a proclamation of the beginning of Vatican II Council. You probably would not be here today had it not been for that statement made by Pope John XXIII at that time. When he opened the second Vatican council on October 11, 1962, he paid “The Bride of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations”.

Fifty years later – this year in announcing the feast of Faith Pope Benedict endorsed the following words of blessed Pope Paul II. He
stated “the texts of the council have lost nothing of value or brilliance – the council is the great grace bestowed on the church in the second century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning”. I reflect and ask on a personal level as a believer and a Catholic – what was my own compass prior to the second Vatican council? My first three years of schooling was in a little hamlet north of Edmonton named Opal. There were eight children in our family and our parents were devoted Catholics. At the age of eight, I received instructions for my first Holy Communion and initial confession. Beyond that there was little religious instruction. Mass was celebrated once a month in our local church. Our parents had little to no education and beyond the rituals in the practice of our faith, they were not in the position to inform us as to the true meaning of our faith. This situation was and is not uncommon.

When moving to Edmonton in 1944, I was fortunate to become a student at St. John’s Elementary School on 120th Street – north of
Jasper which was one block from Oliver Public School. The difference in the student’s position between the two schools was well defined. There were the usual taunting: “you Catlickers” answered by “you Potlickers”. This was the battle cry of the day. It was the devotion in the teaching of the sisters of St. Joseph’s of Halifax in the last class of the day, namely Religion, that I learned about the deeper value of my faith. What was the basis of the foundation of my Catholic faith – Baltimore Catechism in the lower grades and then Cardinal Gaspari Catechism in high school:

1. Who made you? God made me and lives in me.

2. Who is god? God is our Father in Heaven.

3. Why did God make you? God made me: to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world, so that I may be happy through Him in this life, and with Him forever in Heaven.
4. How do you know God? I know God through the teaching of His Church.

This gave me spiritual strength and pride and in many ways we “Catlickers” felt privileged. Four or five extra days off for special Catholic Holy days, the priest would be visiting our school, there were morning prayers and the usual first Friday observances. I belonged to a Catholic boys Scout unit but at the same time we broke down barriers between the “Catlickers and the Pot Lickers” because of the principle and commandment of “love thy neighbour”. As we grew and participated in the community league functions, boys from diverse schools would also be meeting at the paper shack and playing on the same sports teams and came to realize that our community was larger than that of those being only in the “Catholic World”. It is during that time in my formative years that I became an acolyte, then an altar boy and it is when one gives serious thought to the priesthood. All the boys were candidates and many of the girls were thinking of a convent life as
a holy alternative to the priesthood for a vocation. At that time, there was no theological college for layman - only for the seminarians. As I would walk by 100th Avenue at 110 Street on my way to Grandin School for grade 9, I would pass the seminary and the priesthood candidates such as Bill Irwin and John McNeil both of who knew me would yell out of the 3rd floor window “Allan will you be joining us?”. In my eyes at that time, that was the Church. It was the Pope, the bishop, the monsignors, the priests, the teaching nuns and the women at the Convent of the Precious Blood who took a vow of silence and poverty.

My role was to:

1. Attend mass;

2. Keep the commandments and the precepts of the church;

3. Go to confession;

4. Obey your father and mother;

5. Be kind to your neighbours;
6. Try to make the first Fridays;

7. Say the rosary and your morning and night prayers;

8. And thou shall not – etc, etc, etc. All rules.

Simply stated – obey the rules of the church. We had not developed a Social Arm of the church to any extent. There were no parish councils and the priest was the ruler and the laity followed obediently. When I was invited by my high school principal Father McDonald to think seriously of going to the seminary after the graduation of high school, I did give it serious thought. The invitation was also extended to me by Archbishop McDonald for whom I had served mass for three days a week for three years. After serious consideration, I was not inclined to become a seminarian – I left that to the likes of my best friends fathers McCaffrey, Stein and others. I knew the rules and I knew little theology by the time I had left high school.
I was not the only one. The first funeral that filled the Cathedral after it was officially opened on June 29, 1963 was for the late Mr. Justice Hugh John McDonald. At that time there was only one Catholic Justice on the Supreme Court of Alberta. Monsignor Malone in his eulogy stated that although Justice Hugh John was a well informed practicing Catholic, he knew little theology. This was evidence of the fact that during this era even the most enlightened and prominent members of our Church knew any theology.

Not only this distinguished jurist but in reality very few laity of our faith knew much theology. Vatican II came into existence. Things began to change in the eyes of the Catholic community. Those changes disturbed many pious Catholics. They were comfortable with the status quo.

The final stages of construction of the Cathedral was finished and no sooner opened when the altar was moved forward and the priest during mass faced the congregation. Latin was not now the language of
the mass and the communion rail was abolished and on and on. Those were outward signs which were not easy for all to accept. But more important there were constructive measures being implemented to change and emphasize the social arm of the church. By that time Father Bill Irwin had graduated from Fordham University in Social Work and he started Catholic Social Services and it grew to be the proud structure that it is today serving countless areas of society and addressing the needs of so many Albertans which were not being answered.

Archbishop Jordan also abandoned the old Diocesan paper called “the Western Catholic” – a paper meant mainly for the clergy. He brought in a brilliant young editor from Sign Magazine in New York and established the “Western Catholic Reporter” and it became a vital means of communication in the community and reflected the new spirit in the Vatican II. In particular, the paper conveyed the true meaning of the second Vatican Council and this was not always easily accepted by the
members of the diocese. I was a member of the board. This publication was really not without controversy, but the views were met and addressed and gradually the people of faith began to understand the reasons for change.

In 1966, the bishops of Canada established the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace – Share Lent. The first all lay board approved by the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, helped answer the needs of the third world with over 90% of the funds collected going directly to the projects. It adopted the theme “the glory of God is man truly alive”. Churches were no longer square buildings and they were then being built in a semicircular way so as to encompass the parishners in attendance. A reflection of this type of building was St. Mathews Parish which was built in North Edmonton. Father Irwin was the first Pastor while he continued running Catholic Social Services and seeing the growth of St. Mathews by using the laity in the Parish. There was a change in the landscape of the church. St.
Joseph’s boys school and St. Mary’s girls school had merged and this was a bold step in its day in 1954. In the early 60s, the classes were mixed. A bold step. Societies such as St. Vincent De Paul & the Marion Centre grew and even the St. Thomas More Lawyers Guild came into existence at that time. The Knights of Columbus changed their focus as did the CWL. Immigrants from many different countries were being welcomed into the community and encouraged to participate in the Catholic Community. Layman started to preach the homilies at mass and priests were meeting with other representatives of Christian communities as well as the Jewish community. A great friendship grew between Monsignor Malone and Rabi Sacks. The beginning of an Ecumenical Spirit. Women were given more power and they partook in the parish councils as well as playing a part during the communion services.

One of the most tangible changes that took place in Edmonton was the moving of St. Joseph’s Seminary to the new location in St. Albert where
it was joined with the building establishing Newman Theological College. And that is why we are here today.