

Beda Graduation; 2016

Rev. Rector, Monsignor Gillespie, faculty of the Pontifical Beda College, and students. It is a real privilege to be able to join you this morning at the Mass to mark your graduation and the presentation of your certificates. It is a privilege for three reasons.

The first is that today in this ceremony, you have received your professional degree and diploma certificates in theology. I say professional, because that is what they declare to you and to everyone else, that you have been found to have reached the professional and academic level of proficiency in theology. That achievement stands to you for the rest of your life and I know you will make great use of it and you should be duly proud of all the hard work you have put in to reach this stage.

The second reason to be here is to say something about the shared Catholic identity between our two institutions; one a seminary and one a public Catholic university. What is that Catholic identity and why is it important?

Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, during his State Visit to the United Kingdom in 2010, when he visited St. Mary's University, said the fundamental purpose of Catholic education is 'about forming the human person, equipping

him or her to live life to the full – in short it is about imparting wisdom'.¹ We share that.

But to form the whole person there has to be an understanding of what and who the human person is, and where that person stands in the order of creation. It is that view of the human being in the widest context, a Christian anthropology, which sets the Catholic philosophy of education apart and contrasts with contemporary subjectivism.

The Catholic tradition which our two institutions share is distinctive. It is not value free. Pope Francis said in May 2014, “Catholic education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him.

So what is that distinctive offer? That distinctive offer is about living a fulfilled life, rooted in Gospel values, and springing from the central truths of the human person. It is about having a regard for the needs of others and the common good. We also share that commitment.

This brings me to my final reasons why it is a real privilege to be with you today. Here today, that distinctiveness is made real. Something deeper, something more profound, a calling, and a true vocation today complements the professional aspect. So when I say that it is a privilege to be here with you this day, and for St. Mary’s to be part of your academic formation, it is not simply to

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, St. Mary’s University, 17 September 2010, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20100917_mondo-educ.html

see you graduate. It is to see you on that vocational path that each of you is growing towards, the vocation of the ministerial priesthood.

During my time here in Rome, I regularly visited the Beda for the various feast days and ceremonies. I always left having seen the future life of the Church, of having seen so many of you choose to follow a path and a calling, often leaving behind family, friends and professions, to heed a call and to take on a life of service in the Church and the world.

We honour that brave commitment and that call. In today's world it is a courageous one which is often counter cultural. It is truly a call grounded in the Gospels. It is a call not unlike what we are trying to do at St. Mary's University; to be counter cultural and to be distinctive to the age in which we live; to do what Blessed John Henry Newman tried to do at the Catholic University of Ireland; to make real the stress on connectedness; to encourage an inter-disciplinary learning; and to have a formation that is virtue based and provides a framework which contributes to the virtuous dispositions flourishing. In such an environment, the individual is not lost among the crowd but is formed within the societies in which they live and learn. That instinctive pastoral sense is what happens here at the Beda College, an inter-connectedness and a commitment to form each individual in a holistic manner.

We can only respond to that call and do what we do at St. Mary's if we have people prepared to serve the Church as faithful witnesses to the Gospel. You will never know in your priestly life how you might influence the choice of another. It might be through a word, a deed or a silent witness. So today, it is a

real honour to be with you. You are witnesses to that deeper calling that we are all asked to respond to. You have, and in the words of today's readings, responded to the call; 'May the Lord turn your hearts towards the love of God and the fortitude of Christ'. I pray that you will continue to do so each day of your priestly life.

Congratulations graduating class of 2016.