

Valedictorian Address – Br. Michael Perras, OFM

Convocation Newman Theological College

October 13, 2018

Eminent Chancellor, Your Grace, members of the platform party, distinguished guests, fellow graduands, relatives, classmates and friends of Newman, first foremost we must thank our Good and Gracious God for the gift of this day and for each of you who are here celebrating this milestone with us today.

It is because of God at work in us and the support of family, friends, classmates, college support staff from librarians to administration staff, to custodians and of course our professors that we the 31 graduands stand here today with a diploma in hand. We are here today with hearts full of gratitude and again we say thank you. We must also acknowledge those who have done so much for today's celebrations. Thank you.

“God, my God, you I crave; my soul thirsts for you like a dry and weary land.” These are the words of Psalm 63 and they have been prayed by the church hundreds of millions of times. The first time I truly remember hearing those words was in the chapel of the former campus on St. Albert Trail. They were sung by a classmate and they filled the chapel. It stirred something within me and I can't help but wonder if it is not the same for each one of us in this graduating class. Is it not a craving for God that leads one to study theology at varying degrees?

The great privilege to study God comes with challenges, graced moments, opportunities to find our voice, learning to integrate into our life and careers the depths of faith and taking the knowledge we have gained to create and be life-giving for we have studied our Source, the life-giving Word of God. Whether we as graduates in our ministries are preaching to a church packed full of people, or meeting a grieving family, whether we are teaching a child or leading a school, whether we are planning a parish program or studying scripture with the two faithful souls who brave a stormy night and show up at the church, whether we are praying alone in the silence of a chapel or in the

water of a shower, whether we are working towards truth and reconciliation or the care of our common home, whether we are writing a book or writing a policy or writing an icon, whether we are leading a choir or teaching catechism or a science lesson, whether we are serving soup or listening to a “fifth step”, whether we are guiding a diocese or an eparchy or a school division or guiding our family or a community we must take and utilize what we have learned here at Newman Theological College and do so with love.

As St. Francis de Sales reminds us: “The measure of love is to love without measure.” (repeat) Our Lord and Savior showed us this way of love, he now beckons us, not only us the graduates but all of us to be beacons of his love in and for our hurting world, church, schools, communities, parishes and families.

Another great saint named Francis (one I’m a little partial too), that being St. Francis of Assisi once said: “We must never desire to be above, but, instead, we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God’s sake. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon those men and women who have done and persevered in these things and will make a home and dwelling place in them... and they are spouses, brothers and sisters and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is here that our years of study regardless if that was 3, 5, 8, 12, 15 intersects with life. How do we as the spouses, brothers and sisters and mothers of Christ carry Him into the world? This is the gift of theology to embody the lessons learned, the questions asked, the doubts faced, the questions still lingering, the views challenged and to carry Christ and the love of Christ with us in all we do. This diploma is simply a piece of paper, it is in how we live bearing Christ that will make any studying of theology worth the hours spent reading, footnoting, note taking, writing, editing and praying our way to this day.

As a graduate from Newman Theological College I am inspired not only by the wisdom and knowledge here (point to platform party) and here (point to profs/special guests) but also here (point to graduates). I am inspired by sacrifices made, of hospitality shown, of kindness and compassion shared. I am inspired by lives of prayer,

lives of service and lives desiring to be beacons of light. It is a great honor to represent this graduating class and to know that together we carry with us this journey of learning and the wisdom and knowledge gained because of desire, passion and a craving for Christ that we have met in each other and in our studies.

To conclude I searched for some words of wisdom. These words are not from a great philosopher (which we know there are many), not from a wise theologian (which we also know there are many), or detailed liturgist, or even a canonized saint. I leave you with words from an ordinary man, who happens to be a professional football player, and as his college career came to a close, he had choice words to share which I believe apply to each one of us who will graduate today, and for those who teach at Newman Theological College and Saint Joseph Seminary and really for all Christians. It seems to me that Kirk Cousins in his address on behalf of the players echoes the wisdom of St. Francis de Sales and St. Francis of Assisi when he said: “I have been taught that human nature is such that the place of privilege most often and most naturally leads to a sense of entitlement... the truth is, privilege should never lead to entitlement it should lead to responsibility, in fact greater responsibility.” (repeat from: ...the truth)

So as we graduate, we do so not with a sense of entitlement rather it is with a sense of great responsibility that is entrusted to each of us as graduates and also to each one of us here. The great responsibility in building the kingdom because of who we are as God’s beloved children (point to all), because of who we are as followers of Christ (point to all), because of who we are as the graduating class of 2018 (point to class), for this indeed leads us to great responsibility. The choice in how we shape and utilize this responsibility is the challenge we now go forth in our walk with fellow kingdom builders and those seeking the kingdom of our source and summit Jesus Christ. How will we be servants? How will we be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit? How will we take the privilege of our degree and live it with measureless love as spouses, brothers, sisters and mothers of Christ? How will we live the challenge of faith seeking understanding

now? How will we live this great responsibility? The how began in a craving to know our Good and Gracious God more and more and this craving continues as each day we pray, “God, my God, you I crave; my soul thirsts for you like a dry and weary land.” It is with the knowledge and wisdom that we have gained and yet still in our depths this craving that we take leave from Newman Theological College and enter the responsibilities we now bear, and we do so in step with Christ Jesus.

Peace and All Good.

End Notes:

1. Text of Psalm 63 from CBW III – 658 – Psalms for All Seasons, Music by George Black
2. St. Francis de Sales quote from Franciscan Fraternity – Foundation Pillars, Roch Niemier, OFM, pg. 19
3. St. Francis of Assisi quote from Francis of Assisi: The Saint Early Documents, Volume 1, Letter to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, pgs. 48-49
4. Kirk Cousins quote from 2011 Big 10 Kick Off Luncheon speech