Valedictorian Address

Your Excellency, Bishop Bittman, Your Excellency, Bishop Terrio, Your Grace Archbishop MacNeil, Your Excellency Bishop Wiesner, Right Reverend Fr. Wojcichowsky, Eminent Chancellor, members of the platform party, distinguished guests, graduands, relatives, and friends of Newman.

This is the day that the Lord has made – let us rejoice and be glad in it. What a great joy to share this day with you who are most dear to us.

Newman Theological College and St. Joseph’s Seminary are treasures of the Church in western Canada. We are forever grateful to the visionaries and benefactors and visionaries who, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, have built and sustained these beautiful institutions of higher learning to form us for ministry among God’s people.

We are lifelong learners. Some of us began our theology studies in classrooms on St. Albert Trail in another millennium, when the Toronto Blue Jays last made the play-offs! Some heard God calling them to the priesthood and have put out into the deep to become 21st century fishers of God’s people. Some have embraced theology as they prepared for the diaconate, chaplaincy, or other ministries. Most of us have embraced the vocation to serve as Catholic educators, and are living out our baptismal call as teachers, administrators, or
religious education consultants in our Catholic school systems. All of us are truly grateful for the education and formation that we have received.

To the faculty and staff of Newman College, we extend our heartfelt gratitude. You have equipped us to go forth as agents of the New Evangelization and as servant leaders in the Christian community. What works of mercy you have shown us. You have instructed the ignorant, answering our many questions and helping us to learn. When we wondered how, if, and when we would ever complete our course work and projects, you counseled the doubtful. You admonished sinners, especially those of us who found it challenging to get our papers in on time, yet you have borne our wrongs patiently, and forgiven our offences willingly.

In this Year of Consecrated Life, we give thanks to God for the men and women religious, the priests, brothers, and sisters among the faculty of Newman who have been such splendid witnesses and effective proclaimers, and who have played such an integral role in our education and formation. The generous support of their religious communities has been invaluable to the very existence of Newman College and we are truly grateful to them. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless them abundantly.

We are thankful for the gift of public Catholic education, and in particular to our school boards and administrators, who have supported us in our post-graduate studies at Newman. We ask you to continue to pray for our Catholic schools, that we may continue to collaborate with Catholic families and
parishes in forming our children and youth to transform the world with the Joy of the Gospel.

As the General Synod on the Family in Rome unfolds, we express our deep love and gratitude to our families and friends, who have sustained us in mind, body, and spirit through our studies. While the faculty bestowed upon us the spiritual works of mercy, our families and friends engaged in the corporal works of mercy. Through all the reading, the papers and projects, the time spent studying, you gave food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. Your endless source of support and encouragement sustained us in body, mind, and spirit.

In your generosity, kindness, patience, and compassion, we have seen God’s face.

With our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, we pray that families may be places of communion and prayer, that they may never again experience violence, rejection or division, and that all who have been hurt will find comfort and healing.

We give thanks for the gift of our classmates, with whom we have lived and learned in community. In traditional classrooms and in online classrooms, we have come to understand so much from the contributions and questions of our peers. Our collaboration with them has been a source of tremendous learning. We are grateful too for the many opportunities that we have had to pray
together, to taste and see the goodness of our God in the company of our fellow students and staff, especially as we joined together for liturgy.

On this day, the Church celebrates the Feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch, or Theophorus, Bishop of the early Church in Syria. He is recognized among the Fathers of the Church and was one of our first theologians. After being arrested as a disciple of Christ, Ignatius was taken to Rome, where he was martyred in the Roman amphitheatre.

The final letters he wrote are considered to be treasures of the early Christian Church. His words are good advice for those of us who graduate today with degrees in theology or religious education:

“Let no rank puff up anyone, for faith and love are paramount – the greatest blessings in the world.

I close with these words from the letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Ephesians:
Pray without ceasing on behalf of others.
See that they be instructed by your works, if in no other way.
Meet their angry outbursts with your own gentleness,
their boastfulness with your humility,
their abuse with your prayers.
In contrast to their error, be steadfast in the faith;
and for their harshness, manifest meekness.
While we take care not to imitate their conduct,
let us be found their brothers and sisters in all true kindness
and let us seek to be followers of the Lord

On behalf of the Newman Theological College Class of 2015, thank you.
We are grateful to all of you, who have sown and nurtured the seeds of faith in us, and who have helped us to grow in understanding. May God bless you.