

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, distinguished guests, graduates, staff, students.

Some fifteen years ago, I was attending a planning session in Canberra. We were seated in small groups around tables, and at one stage our general manager was walking around asking individuals where they envisaged being in five years' time. This is the corporate equivalent of asking school children what they want to be when they grow up. I of course was sitting at the back and daydreaming, so I was caught off guard when the general manager suddenly appeared at our table and asked me. Without even thinking, my response was: "Buried among books in some European library." I remember her staring at me. I stared back. I was as surprised as she was at my answer.

I had no idea where that came from.

But I think that translated as: "anywhere but here."

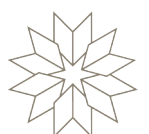
Well, that "anywhere" turned out to be far away.

I never imagined myself researching the saints' calendars of a group of Christians in fifth to ninth century Syria-Mesopotamia. Until recently, I didn't even know that they existed. But over the last four years that's exactly what I have been doing, buried among books in a library, even if electronically.

Why study old saints' calendars? Intellectual curiosity. No one had looked at these calendars properly before, plus I was interested in finding new ways of analysing ancient evidence. I found that one could learn a lot about a community of people by looking at how they structured and remembered their past.

Studying the past and how people remember the past are important exercises for that reason: the past explains who we are today. The past we commemorate tells us something about our foundations and values. Shared understandings of the past can bind us together. Disputed pasts can tear us apart. The past can be a weapon – we have no starker illustration today than the Russian president's use of an imaginary past to justify the war against Ukraine. That should terrify any responsible historian and policy adviser! But the past can also be a comfort and a source of strength and inspiration. We who are Christians are assured of our future hope because of what God has done for us in the past.

Let me finish by congratulating all who graduated here tonight and those who graduated in absentia – with a special shout out to Carol McDonough, who received her Graduate Diploma and dearly wanted to be here in person. Friends, on this day, on this occasion, we can be proud of our achievement. Many of you have faced significant hurdles to complete your studies – I know some of your stories – and that only makes your graduation more joyful and remarkable. Savour it. Celebrate! Thank you to our families and friends who have supported us in so many ways: we could not have done this without you. Thank you also to those around us who could not understand why we pursued divinity studies – I mean at one stage my mother thought I had joined a cult! Your perplexity stirred our passion and challenged us to evaluate our motives and clarify our goals. You are part of our success. It's an honour to receive the University Medal and I want to acknowledge my colleague, the newly minted Dr. Roger Whittall, who was also recommended for the medal and what a revelation! Dr Joel Rothman was the third one, from Whitley College. Good on you. We thank the faculty and staff of all the colleges at the University and our research supervisors for their investment into our own learning and research. I personally owe much to Professors Wendy Mayer and Chris L. de Wet. I am proud to



be continuing my association with the University as a lecturer at St Athanasius College. Thank you Father Daniel, Dr Lisa Agaiby and all SAC staff for your welcome and support.

Friends, at this stage in life I wouldn't want to be anywhere else but here, and I hope you will always find yourself in the place you want to be.

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**Dr Katherin Papadopoulos, Doctor of Philosophy 2022**

