

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Archbishop Comensoli, distinguished guests, colleagues, graduates, family and friends:

I.

About six months ago, I stood at the lectern in this cathedral to read one of the Scripture lessons at the funeral of Gerald O'Collins. Fr Gerry was a highly respected and much-loved scholar and teacher in our community here in the University of Divinity; a sociable man, a prolific writer (right up to the end of his life) and an eminent theologian. Indeed, the first book I ever read in theology was Gerry's *Foundations of Theology* (published in 1971). His death at the age of 93 was a source of grief and loss for many but also a cause of celebration for his long and fruitful life.

One of the best things about Gerry is that he was a person of profound reflection. He reflected on Sacred Scripture, on the theological traditions of the church, on his own life experience over decades of change in both church and world, and on contemporary issues facing the life of the church. This reflectiveness of his went along with long periods of teaching and writing and spiritual direction, as a Jesuit priest and a scholar: here in Australia, in Europe and in many other places across the world.

We may feel we can never emulate Gerry's vast number of books and his extensive teaching and spiritual leadership. But we can aspire to emulate his deeply reflective spirit which was both intellectual and affective, of the head and of the heart.

II.

Any degree or diploma should, above all things, teach us how to think, to reflect on our own lives and our world in a way that is critical, compassionate and constructive, a reflection that turns us always towards the needs of others. It includes consideration of the traditions which have been handed down to us, as well as on our current situation, both in the church and in our wider society.

One of the problems we face here and elsewhere in the world today is precisely a reluctance to engage in critical and compassionate reflection. Our society and our institutions respond superficially at so many levels and even at times unethically: with an almost obsessive anxiety about their public image; and sometimes also with avarice and greed. Which show anything but the capacity for critical and engaged thinking.

And that's a dangerous place for us to be in. We can be easily manipulated, enticed by the voices around us to think only of our immediate and individual comfort—thus maintaining the status quo. Yet our rich spiritual and theological traditions have often been at the forefront of the kind of challenging thinking that can turn the world on its head.

This willingness to think, to challenge, to reflect with compassion is based on our conviction that the Holy Spirit, within and among us, is leading us into all truth. It is the Spirit's presence which inspires and empowers us to become people of depth, able to critique our world and our own hearts, our past history and present structures. The Spirit shines the seering light of truth on us, on our society, on our actions.

In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates at his trial in Athens in 399 BCE, famously said that 'the unexamined life is not worth living' — or, more accurately, 'the unexamined life is not a human life.' It was a saying that won him no favours in the eyes of his harsh and complacent judges.



As students and graduates, you've all just been through years of examination, even if mostly of the essay-writing kind. And you know that that saying is true, if you want to gain your degree or diploma. But it's also true, as Socrates intended it, at the broadest level as well.

The Sermon in the Mount in Matthew's Gospel is a summons to reflect and to take action on the basis of that reflection. 'Blessed are those who mourn', says Jesus — those who mourn for the loss and grief and pain of the world. 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness'. Jesus is speaking, in other words, of those who lived an examined life, who consider it in its depths; far more blessed than those who never seek goodness and justice, who never mourn, but who instead pursue of wealth and comfort and status.

Of course, the examined life is not necessarily an end in itself. We don't want to become dilettantes. The examined life takes seriously the search for truth and wisdom. We're not playing games; we're in it with everything we have and everything we are. Indeed, our personal and social well-being depends on the capacity to examine, to reflect, to contemplate, to challenge and, through it all, to seek truth above all things.

More than that: the examined life aims to serve, as our University's graduate attributes emphasise: to serve by working for justice and equity, for reconciliation and peace. That's where the Spirit guides us, drawing us into a community that seeks the divine vision for us and for our world.

III.

More often than not, it's the more difficult road we're summoned to choose, as you know already from your academic study. It's not the easy path. It's the Lenten path of examination and repentance, of return and homecoming. It's not about living complacently with the way things are, turning deaf ears to the cries of pain all around us. Instead, the harder choice is the one in which we're prepared to examine and be examined, to challenge and be challenged, to give and receive mercy. This is the path of truth and wisdom and its ultimate goal is resurrection, the restoration of all things in God.

So this graduation tonight invites us follow the example of Gerry O'Collins. On the basis of our theological education, the degrees and diplomas we've attained, we're summoned to continue as those who live the examined life, who go on thinking and reflecting and reading, including the books written by Gerry himself. It's only the examined life that will make us ready to engage in the radical service of others: for the sake of our institutions, our churches, our world and indeed our whole planet.

Reverend Canon Professor Emerita Dorothy Lee AM FAHA

