



**Graduation Mass  
The University of Notre Dame Australia (Fremantle)**

**Homily**

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Archbishop of Perth**

Tuesday 11 December 2018  
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth

On August 11, 1890, in Birmingham in England, John Henry Newman, a Cardinal of the Catholic Church, died at the age of eighty-nine. He had been brought up in the Calvinist tradition of Christianity. As a young man he found himself drawn to the more liturgically-based tradition of the Anglican Church but eventually, at the age of forty-four, Newman, who by this time was an Anglican priest, became a member of the Catholic faith, and remained a Catholic for the rest of his life.

On November 29 this year, just two weeks ago, it was reported that a second miraculous cure attributed to Newman's prayers had been verified by the Church, thus opening up the very real possibility that Newman will be canonised as saint some time in 2019.

Some of you will have heard of John Henry Newman, but many of you will not and may be wondering why I would mention him during a Graduation Mass for Notre Dame University. There are many reasons – Newman stands as one of the great intellectual thinkers of modern Catholicism – but the main reason for bringing him to your attention this evening is because he once wrote a series of lectures, eventually published as a book entitled *"The Idea of a University"*. While Cardinal Newman's thought is inevitably marked by the time and culture in which he lived, one of his central ideas in his lectures is as valid today as it ever was. A university, Newman was convinced, has to have a "soul". In making such a claim, Newman is pointing us beyond a narrowly academic understanding of the role of a university, and much more beyond a strictly utilitarian concept of a university which would see it only as a door to a lucrative career. For Newman, the experience of attending a university should be so important that it marks a person for the rest of his or her life. And why? Because, as Newman puts it, a university education enables, or should enable, a person to move towards *"a clear, calm, accurate vision and comprehension of all things"*. If the only thing you have achieved during your time at Notre Dame is "employability" – important as this is – then the university has failed you. You may have engaged well with the skeletal structure of the University, but you have missed its soul.

That "soul" of course is grounded in the Christian faith which is the founding inspiration and continuing ethos of Notre Dame. We live in a world in which we encounter many competing world



views, many competing, and even conflicting, ways of understanding the meaning of life. And as we move through life ourselves one of our great tasks is to decide which “world view”, which set of foundational values, is going to guide us on our journey. Notre Dame, as a Catholic university, knows that it is not its task to impose the Catholic vision on anyone. But it is the University’s task, as it is the University’s privilege, to propose this vision of life to all who encounter the University in any way, leaving people free to make their own decisions, but hoping nonetheless that its own witness to its beliefs will be a powerful testimony to the beauty, inner coherence and promise of the Christian faith as it is lived and believed in in the Catholic Church.

At the heart of this vision of life of course we find the person of Jesus. It is he who gives Christianity its “soul” and therefore he who gives Notre Dame University its “soul”. Christianity is a challenging and unsettling faith. It seems constantly to be inviting us to see things differently, to do things differently. The Christian faith is like this because Jesus was and is like this. He always challenges us to critique the presuppositions and accepted wisdom of the societies in which we live, and ultimately measure them against the culture of the gospel.

This evening’s gospel passage is a good example. Jesus speaks of the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep untended in the wilderness while he goes off in search of the one which has got lost. While Jesus praises this shepherd – and the subtext of course is that this shepherd is an image of Jesus himself – his listeners must have been wondering if the shepherd had lost his mind. Why leave ninety-nine sheep untended and run the very real risk of all of them straying, just to go after the lost one? It makes no sense, and certainly no economic sense, to do so! What Jesus seems to be doing is reminding his hearers that if they base their lives on his teaching and example – if they adopt his world view in other words – then their decisions and life-choices will have to be based on more than cold clear logic, and certainly on more than economic considerations for, as the scriptures often point out, God’s ways are not ways.

As you all turn your minds, and your hearts, towards the future I hope that your time at Notre Dame has exposed you to the world view, the value system, on which the university stands. I hope that the gospel vision, the way of Jesus, has been proposed to you in a faithful, compelling and attractive way. Many of you will already be deeply committed to this way of Jesus. Other perhaps not. But if you have been able to catch a glimpse of the “soul” which enlivens all that the university seeks to do and to be, then you too might begin to see that sometimes we have to go after the lost one even when the risk is real and the cost is great. The “lost one” may be someone we have hurt; it may be our own integrity; it may be our faith. Whatever it is the time may well come when we realise that we have lost something precious and need to go in search of it.

Cardinal Newman knew this. In becoming a Catholic he had to leave behind much that was familiar to him and loved by him. But in making those hard choices he discovered the “soul” of Christianity – and he may soon be a saint!