

USJ CONGREGATION 2019 – 13 JULY 2019

SPEECH BY RECTOR OF UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH – PROF. FR. PETER STILWELL

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Welcome to all. This is the second time in seven years that we have held our Congregation at Macao Tower. It has the merit of allowing us to bring everyone together in one event, and in that sense gives us a general picture of the University.

As I considered this, while preparing my speech, it occurred to me that perhaps the tower could be seen as an image of how our academic work is intended to give us a bird's eye view of the city and the challenges it faces. What we do at USJ is, in most cases, what the Greeks called "theoria", and Christians later called "contemplatio". We look closely at issues in the life and work of the community and, as we get to better understand them, through discussion and research, we also discover ways in which to handle them that will help everyone move forward to a more caring and inclusive society – which is why Aristotle considered that "the *theoria* (*θεωρία*) of the universe must be honoured above all things that are considered useful".¹

Let me give you an example. Last Sunday, our Research Coordinator, Gerald Estadieu, showed Fr Luís Sequeira and myself round the Exhibition of Italian Renaissance Drawings from the British Museum, which was on its last day at the Macao Museum of Art. He guided us slowly past the powerful sketches of the human body by Italian masters and then brought us to a section prepared by staff and students from USJ's Department of Design – which, as you know, is part of our Faculty of Creative Industries and resides on the 6th floor of our academic building. They were aware that it is difficult for the untrained eye to appreciate the details of a long line of small drawings, hanging on a museum wall – specially if you are young and touring the exhibition with a group of colleagues. So, USJ's team had submitted a proposal, readily appreciated and accepted by those preparing the exhibition and by the senior staff of the British Museum. USJ's designers proposed to work with high quality copies of a small number the drawings and produce three-dimensional versions that people could touch or look at from different angles. I was impressed by the number of people who had visited that section of the Exhibition. Proof that they had been there was clear for all to see, in the drawings and signatures covering a whole wall specially prepared for interaction. I was proud to hear that the senior staff from the British Museum had been much impressed by this creative project, which had provided such added

¹ Aristotle, Protrepticus, B44.

interest to their exhibition. But I was particularly touched to hear that some visually impaired visitors had been so excited to actually be able to feel some of these classical drawings. If it had not been for this special section, they would not have come to the exhibition, because it was a part of the world that was normally closed to them. Now it had been thrown open by a project thought up by someone who had thought of their plight and found a creative solution. And there you have it: an example of what it means to contemplate, academically, the world around us, as if from the Macao Tower; an example also of what we mean when we say that USJ is committed to developing an inclusive, caring society.

Before I finish, let me congratulate all of you to who today we award an Associate Diploma, or a Bachelor, Master or Doctoral degree. This ceremony marks the end of a cycle of studies, and the beginning of a new chapter in your lives. You have been guided through your studies by some of the professors on the stage behind me, and by many visiting academics from other parts of the world. But that is not the whole story. I was struck, a week ago, by the comments of the keynote speakers during the inauguration of our new Bishop Lam Centre for Research in Education. According to Prof. Morrison – or was it Prof. Morgan? –, research shows that students at university learn more from interacting with their colleagues than from the lectures of their professors. With our new campus, and the balanced size of our academic community, I believe this is what many of you may already have experienced. Certainly, it is an experience I would much like USJ to provide in the years ahead. However, if that is even partially true, at least for some of you today this celebration is tinged with sadness, as you bid farewell to friends and colleagues and face new challenges in your professional lives. If that is so, remember USJ, your *alma mater*; return to us for further studies; link up with your colleagues through our Alumni Association.

A word of congratulations also to the parents and friends of all who graduate today. I am sure the support you have given has been important for our students. Their success is also yours.

Finally, thanks are due: to our **academic staff**, who have diligently walked the distance with you and have watched your minds mature; to our **administrative staff**, who have discreetly ensured that the university is running smoothly in the background, so teaching, learning and research can proceed without unwelcome distractions; to all **those who organized** and are running this Congregation, trying to foresee the smallest detail; to our **Chancellor**, who regularly challenges us to aim ever higher and do ever better – we truly count on your interest and your support.

Before I end, let me publicly express my gratitude to the Director of DSES, Mr Sou Chio Fai. Over the past seven years I have had the privilege of watching him nurture higher education in Macao to ever higher standards. He has led teams of Macao's rectors and presidents on visits to universities in Brazil, Portugal, Germany and Britain. But, most of all, he and his staff have provided constant support to USJ, as circumstances surrounding our institution set us a veritable obstacle course calling for creative solutions. Please extend our warmest thanks to Secretary Alexis Tam, who kindly apologised for not being present at our Congregation due to a previous engagement.

God bless you all, and may Saint Joseph watch over us.