It is a delight, on behalf of all of my La Retraite Sisters, to be here this evening to celebrate ten years of the Centre for Catholic Studies.

The ten years seem to have moved by very fast. It doesn’t seem so long ago that Paul and his colleagues visited us to propose our playing a part in the foundation of the Centre for Catholic Studies and establishment of the Bede Chair. I remember well the keen enthusiasm with which they shared their vision for what we now taste the fruits of. I remember too our initial wariness about that enthusiasm, feeling it might conceal a too fixed drive to shape the future in a certain way …. and our delight when upon exploration and dialogue we discovered an open and willing University, encountered Bishop Dunn RIP and subsequently Bishop Séamus Cunningham who courageously forged forwards in an enterprise which has proved less possible in other jurisdictions, such as my own. And met also the Oakley Sisters of Mercy, themselves equally ready to enter into this adventure. In exchange and dialogue, we found partners we could trust and saw that the enthusiasm we met was in fact a face of the Spirit, alive and active.

And now, here we are, at a significant milestone, ten years on. Such a milestone is an opportunity to look back in gratitude for what has developed, as we have been doing today.

We might look in appreciation for how the structure and personnel of the Centre has developed; the Bede Chair being augmented by the St Hilda Chair for example.

Or we might look at the output and influence of the work of the staff and students of the Centre for Catholic Studies, evident in the areas of Catholic social thought and practice, constructive theology and the history of Catholicism. It’s always risky to name particular contributions but my mind goes to recent research among migrants, to publishing on receptive ecumenism and to the exploration of suffering, diminishment and love, to name but a few.

Or we might look at the way in which the centre works; characterized as it is by high quality theology which does not ignore pastoral reflection and practice but rather attends to how theology can ripple out beyond the Academy into parish and public life, effecting change there.

Another feature of the Centre’s distinctive way of working, it seems to me, is that of the drawing together of disciplines into dialogue; disciplines which in the past might have been content to stay in their own corners without the benefit and freshness of each other’s ways
of looking at the same concern. In that context the La Retraite Sisters are delighted to be able to further support the Centre for Catholic Studies by the launch of a new research post in Spirituality and Theology; one which we hope will draw these two disciplines into deeper dialogue.

Of course, a ten year milestone is not only an occasion of looking back to savour and learn from what has happened. It is also an opportunity to take stock and look forwards to how we might secure an agile yet stable context in which the CCS can continue to thrive into the future. It’s a moment of tuning in afresh to the Spirit to ask what would she have us do now? Where is her generous impulse beckoning now? I would really want to encourage each of us to find a way to support the future of the CCS, whether through study and research, by funding, by prayer, but certainly through friendship; that together we might be a community of the Spirit where each one can play their note.

So, as we end this meal now, let’s pray a blessing on what we have received, through this meal and through the Centre for Catholic Studies, that it may in turn, through us, provide nourishment for others.

\[
\text{We end this meal with grace} \\
\text{For the joy and nourishment of food,} \\
\text{The slowed time away from the world} \\
\text{To come into the presence with each other} \\
\text{And sense the subtle lives behind our faces,} \\
\text{The different colours of our voices,} \\
\text{The edges of hungers we keep private,} \\
\text{The circle of love that unites us.} \\
\text{We pray the wise spirit who keeps us} \\
\text{To change the structures that make others hunger} \\
\text{And that after such grace we might now go forth} \\
\text{And impart dignity wherever we partake.}
\]


Amen.