



**AND RENEW THE FACE OF THE EARTH.**

*(Ps 104:30)*

**Address of Reverend Father Talal Hachem**

President of the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)

On the Occasion of USEK Patronal Day

*May 30, 2020*

## **SIMPLICITY, EFFICIENCY AND PERSEVERANCE USEK KEYS WHILE MOVING FORWARD**

We are indeed living in unprecedented times and the past few months have been a cause of concern for all of us: new challenges requiring innovative solutions, new paradigms reshaping our mindsets, and new situations requiring drastic shifts to virtual worlds.

We started our academic year in Lebanon with a revolution that has been pinpointing the sharp economic, political, ethical and social crisis in which Lebanon is immersed. This sharp crisis, worsened by the coronavirus global pandemic, has affected every aspect of our life and led us to rethink our approaches, our behavior and our perception of all matters of life. Yet, we must admit that this same crisis enabled us to develop new models, realign our priorities and prepare for a post-coronavirus world not in isolation but rather in collaboration.

This year, our Pentecost celebration takes a different form; this year, unlike past years, we did not get together in one place to celebrate, greet each other, enjoy together and fill the place... However, we know that the Spirit is with us, on our Patron's day and every day, and brings us all together wherever we are!

While the global response to the coronavirus pandemic remains a matter of the widest international extent, and the economic situation in Lebanon keeps wreaking havoc, triggering unrest and creating dire financial conditions, what has been at the forefront of our mind, as a University, in our local society, is to adapt, support and sustain our educational system. In such a changing university world and governance mindset, simplicity, efficiency and perseverance turned out to be the magnets for success.

### **Constructive Simplicity in a Complex Environment**

Even before the pandemic emerged, USEK had embraced strategic proactive measures and backwardly designed steps to prepare for any emergency scenario and explore relevant recovery plans. Throughout this process, constructive simplicity was key. While the scale of the challenges lying ahead is truly without precedent, our priorities now are to be focused with clear and achievable objectives, to identify accessible and appropriate tools to maintain quality teaching and learning while obviously having our students at the core of the learning process, and to ensure the wellbeing of all our stakeholders, faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni, always guided by our Patron the Holy Spirit

and inspired by the teachings of our *raison d'être* from the outset, the Lebanese Maronite Order .

The approach USEK has been adopting is based on a clear, transparent and open communication with the members of its community. Every time the circumstances change, we start again and reach out to our entire community to prepare the ground for the expected change. To sustain our education loop, most of our students were secured with distance and online learning and different forms of on-going virtual communications with faculty and instructors to make up for the on-campus and face-to-face meetings.

We examined, discussed, debated, approved, and sometimes disapproved, our options and potential solutions within our University Council over and over again. Yet, our utmost concern has been, in light of the prevailing digital transformation, to ensure the necessary flexibility in the use of tools, layouts, and other settings, to enable our education workforce to operate in new and different ways and to support our students.

Within such a challenging and complex situation, and while knowing that the more we comply with the national guidelines, the better we will be, we stressed the fact that social distancing within the USEK community is far from being a social disengagement. It is rather a time to build on what we already have, to connect and engage in social action and quality interaction in order to nurture our human bonds.

### **Efficiency in a Time of Uncertainty**

Beyond our proactivity and our steadfast response, efficiency remained a central driving force and an end during these uncertain times. What we have done is to render up as much educational continuity as possible by all the possible means we have and to maintain our administration accessible and responsive. Our academic and administrative community members have faced the situation with a variety of creative, innovative, sensational, contextual and challenging solutions to support continuity in teaching and learning while ensuring the provision of services to our students with a great sensitivity to their needs.

Investing in technology to unravel specific situations has been also crucial. While preserving our community's health, safety and wellbeing remains our priority, we

spared no effort to ensure that the best interests of our students are met, and their right to have their efforts and endeavors fairly assessed and recognized is respected.

Addressing the challenges of the financial situation is as well a high priority at USEK; in order to respond to these challenges, the University has been striving to secure international sources knowing that the current outbreak has greatly impacted the economic sector on both the local and international levels. And here I cannot but mention the support of the Lebanese Maronite Order that has always upheld the good of its communities, prioritized knowledge and sustained education. I would like also to thank the members of our Board of Trustees for their unwavering support and their many contributions to the mission of USEK.

#### **Perseverance, Determination and Resolute Attitude**

Many people, our faculty, administrative staff, students, alumni, trustees, friends, partners, supporters... have made USEK what it is now. Many good people have participated in its growth. Their invaluable performance, their perseverance, and resolute attitude in giving excellence whatever it takes are key to our success. In fact, their sacrifice, which is a pure expression of solidarity, has contributed to USEK's march forward as a solid community despite all the challenges. This is why we are determined to carry on, to constantly improve, to learn from the current opportunity, and to get the best out of it.

Many of us are overwhelmed by anxiety, unease and tiresome, but we always need to remember that we are still called to promote and live our Catholic mission, especially in such times, knowing that every glory goes for sure through the Cross. Our Catholic mission makes us open to everyone without any discrimination. I believe theology, philosophy, social sciences and humanities have a crucial role to play here after the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. They would need to answer the basic question of who we are, how to respond to living in a changed world, and how to re-think and re-imagine the future while keeping our thoughts and plans anchored in our Catholic values. We should take advantage of this crisis to think differently, to devise new ways of helping each other and serving our close community as well as the entire society. Our role today is to offer a new vision of tomorrow to our students, our direct community, and the society at large.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

Hardships and inconvenient circumstances may impede or slow down a society's move forward. However, having trust in God and in all the skills He bestowed upon us, namely simplicity, determination, efficiency, and perseverance, would help a society overcome all obstacles hindering its real development. Having experienced the work of our Patron, the Holy Spirit, we, at USEK, are aware that today the entire world is going through challenging times, but we also know it is the right time to empower our faith and work together for the good of humanity. It is the time to deepen our relationship with each other, with God our Father, with Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, and as we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we raise each other up in faith and joy.



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