



Illustrious guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I greatly appreciate your presence at this act, which is so important in our academic life.

Today we welcome into the University of Lisbon as *Honoris Causa Doctors*, four figures of exceptional merit: Professors Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Maria Helena Rocha Pereira, Sir Peter Bell and Mark Savickas.

In them we applaud what is great in the University: dedication to the training of new generations, the spirit of discovery and of scientific creation, and participation on social progress.

In them we acknowledge three words that might have fallen into disuse, but which the reality of things obliges us to rediscover, knowing as we do that without them there is no university, nor science, nor culture.

Let us recall, then, the word *generosity*. Let us recall it in this year dedicated to Charles Darwin. Biologists have identified two major forces of evolution: mutation and selection. But one should add another one – cooperation – as Professor António Coutinho explained in his speech after receiving the University of Lisbon Prize: “All major evolutionary transitions, veritable leaps in the quality and “interest” of life, were of a cooperative nature”.

Let us then recall the word *altruism* or, even better, that French word that is so difficult to translate into Portuguese: “*désintéressement*”. Might it be that there is a better concept than this to translate that which university teaching should be? Are we still in time to see the achievement of a “disinterested” university; that is, interested in the human condition and committed to the long time of history, and which does not become choked by the petty interests of the petty present?

Let us, finally, recall the word *truth*, and the freedom it supposes. We are obliged to “listen to the chimes of the parish clock”, using what they tell us in order to build the “future Portugal”. It is without doubt a tough exercise, as Ruy Belo reminds us, but it is the only one that dignifies us as university members. It is not through ignoring or disguising that one builds the knowledge of the future.

It is in these *noble causes* that the *Honoris Causa* PhD is defined. They are causes that grant meaning to the life of the four people we are honouring at this ceremony with the highest distinction the university has.

In times of uncertainty, of doubt and of hesitation it is more than ever necessary to guarantee the stability of the institutions and the trust we place in them.

In difficult times we need the humility that is a part of wisdom, the doubt that awakens that which is best in the human being, the independence and critical thought that are the basis for the scientific and university spirit.

In difficult times it is up to us to keep alive the values that made the university in the past and will make it in the future. We should look to the example of the four people we are now about to honour and encounter within them the spirit to persist, to continue.