ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

SIGILLUM MAGNUM DI ATENEO A JOEL MOKYR

Bologna, 24 settembre 2026

Discorso del Rettore Giovanni Molari

Distinguished Authorities, dear Colleagues, dear Students, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to you all on this important day, as we gather for the conferral of the Sigillum Magnum upon Professor Joel Mokyr, winner of the 2025 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, whom I greet on behalf of our entire University with deep gratitude and admiration.

I also greet Professor Carlotta Berti Ceroni, Head of the Department of Economics, who will shortly introduce Professor Mokyr, his studies and his work.

The Sigillum Magnum is the highest honour of the Alma Mater, awarded to figures of international standing who, through their scientific or civic commitment, embody the values of the University and contribute to fulfilling its mission.

Today, this recognition pays tribute not only to the excellence of a scholar, but also to a way of understanding research and the role of the University that is deeply close to the identity of the Alma Mater.

At the heart of Mokyr's research lies a fundamental question: why, starting from the Industrial Revolution, did technological progress stop being a matter of isolated innovations and become a continuous, cumulative process, capable of sustaining growth over the long term?

His answer highlights the interplay between scientific knowledge and practical skills, between "knowing why" something works and "knowing how" to turn it into techniques, tools and applications.

But Mokyr also shows that knowledge does not produce innovation automatically. To become a force for change, it must be preserved, shared and subjected to criticism,

within societies and institutions that are open to the circulation of ideas and to experimentation.

It is precisely here that his research meets the mission of the University in a particularly direct way.

The University is, in fact, one of the fundamental places where knowledge is produced, transmitted and allowed to grow over time.

It is a space in which acquired knowledge can be called into question, and in which it is possible to ask new questions, even when the answers are not yet known.

This perspective is also reflected in the interdisciplinary character of Mokyr's work.

His research brings economics and history, science and technology, institutions and culture into dialogue, showing that complex phenomena such as innovation and growth cannot be understood through a single discipline.

It is a particularly timely lesson.

The great transformations of our time require, indeed, the ability to bring different skills into dialogue and to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications.

The University has the task of creating the conditions so that knowledge can continue to be produced, transmitted, discussed and transformed: it is here that Professor Mokyr's work and philosophy echo the vocation of the University of Bologna and its fundamental values.

For these reasons, the conferral of the Sigillum Magnum upon Joel Mokyr represents not only the recognition of an extraordinary scientific career, but also a tribute to research grounded in scientific rigour, in dialogue between fields of knowledge, and in responsibility towards society. It is research that has shown how deeply knowledge, freedom, the circulation of ideas and innovation are bound together.

We therefore thank Professor Mokyr wholeheartedly for having wished to be with us today, and for having agreed to become part of the Alma Mater through the conferral of the Sigillum Magnum.

Thank you.