Today, is an historic day. Until now, women have had to forge their own paths towards spiritual leadership. And there have indeed been unique and talented women throughout the ages who have studied and lead, in whose footsteps you walk.

But, Ruth, Rachel and Abby, my cherished talmidot, and sisters,

אֲחֹתֵנוּ, אַתְּ הֲיִי לְאַלְפֵי רְבָבָה

Today, as you crossed that threshold and accepted your ordination, we begin to become a multitude.

This is the beginning of a new reality. From today, chet b’tammuz, 5773, this is what the Orthodox community now looks like-- with men and women standing side by side, leading and shaping the Jewish community.

And, this room is made up of the visionaries, the risk takers, the believers and the supporters at every level, of what we are celebrating today. Everyone should feel proud of the role they have played in getting us to today.

While we are here to celebrate three spectacular women, we are also celebrating a wonderful milestone in the growth and evolution of our community.

Ruth, Rachel and Abby: I am filled with awe and wonder at your achievements.  You have each walked a long road to arrive at this moment. I offer you the following blessing:

In Sefer Zechariah, 3:7, an angel of God gives Yehoshua, the High Priest, a charge

כֹּה-אָמַר יְה צְבָאוֹת,

So said the Lord of Hosts,

If you walk in my path and keep my charge …  
Then, what will be your reward?

--ונָתַתִּי לְךָ מַהְלְכִים, בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים הָאֵלֶּה.

I will permit you to walk amongst the omdim-- those who stand still.

Four years ago, you had the courage to be the first to “walk in God’s path,” and join Yeshivat Maharat’s inaugural class.   And, for the past four years, you have studied and immersed yourselves in God’s Torah, mastered halakha, and honed your pastoral skills.  You interned in shuls, on college campuses, and you taught adults and children. You have chosen to walk in God’s way, and you have kept God’s charge.

And now you have been granted ordination, and with it the tremendous privilege and responsibility, of walking amongst the people,  “mahl’chim bayn ha’omdim.”

The phrase mahl’chim bayn ha’omdim paints a vivid image of people who are walkers and those who stand still.

At Yeshivat Maharat, we have emphasized the ethic of walking-- we have given you the tools to learn how to be mahlchot.  You have learned to keep moving boldly forward from your teachers who model marching towards justice and morality, who have walked by your side.

But there is a certain wisdom that the omdim offer as well. Halakha, walking, is dependent upon the ability to know when to stand still. We cannot appreciate how far we have come, until we stop in humble self reflection.   In our own lives, we stop 3 times a day and stand with our feet together to say the amidah, the standing prayer.  We nourish our spiritual selves so that we can once again merit to journey forward.  And, as we take those three steps backwards and forwards, we do so slightly bent over, and then stand, in reflective humility.

It is at these moments of anava, of humility, that we must give kavod to the Torah giants, who came before us. To the men and women, many of whom are here today, who have dug the trenches, showed us the path, and paved the road. Who have known when to walk and when to stand still, so that we could continue their journey.

But, as you walk, there will be times when you will encounter omdim who are stagnant, who stand still, and block your way forward. And there will be times when you will become frozen, unable to move forward.

At those times, I ask you to keep walking boldly and humbly forward.

And I have seen first hand your fortitude to take those first courageous steps towards your dreams-- of leading and serving the Jewish people.

Ruth-- you have found your path.  You have a unique ability to connect with people through your honesty and openness. You use Jewish text and halakha to guide you and you seamlessly integrate Torah with avodah, with service to others.  

Rachel-- you have been navigating this path for so many years already, teaching us from the field what lays ahead. You already guide and preach with such passion, yet you had the foresight to understand that ordination would be a necessary step towards helping you become the best spiritual guide possible.   
  
Abby-- you too were already serving your community but wanted to offer deeper pastoral and halakhic guidance to your congregants. Your teaching attracts students, young and old, as you instill in them a love for Torah and learning that is so much in the fiber of your being.

Today, you have accepted the responsibility of helping others walk towards greater spiritual heights. Helping them to become ma’halchim.

So, I bless you, Ruth, Rachel and Abby, that you will be

מַהְלְכִוֹת, בֵּין הָעֹמְדִים

May you keep walking, even if others remain stagnant, or run too far afield. At those times, may you inspire others to join your journey, and keep walking.

With God as your guide, walk.

Walk towards justice. Walk with integrity. Walk boldly, with courage and pride.

And walk humbly, remembering those who walked before you and honoring those who courageously walk with you.

And, as you walk, remember that you are not alone. Look around. Look at the expressions of joy and admiration, and respect, on the faces of the hundreds who have gathered here. And imagine the excitement of all those not-yet-here for whom you now model a powerful path forward.

Ruth, Rachel, and Abby. Know that as you march forward, we-- all of us—this entire community, walks with you.

Mazal Tov!