



Workers into the Harvest: Priesthood in the New  
Millennium; Rector's Conference — Volume I



Workers into the Harvest:  
Priesthood in the New  
Millennium; Rector's  
Conference — Volume I

*Saint Meinrad Studies in Pastoral Ministry No. 5*

*VERY REV. DENIS ROBINSON, OSB*

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# Saint Meinrad Pastoral Studies Series

VERY REV. DENIS ROBINSON, OSB

For 150 years, Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has striven to provide the highest quality education and formation for priests, permanent deacons and lay ministers for the life of the Church. This work has gone on because Saint Meinrad has always been convinced that the Church deserves the brightest, holiest and most ardent ministers for service to God's people.

Today more than ever, in a rapidly changing and expanding Church environment, the work of formation needs to find new and creative ways of raising up these ministers. The Saint Meinrad Pastoral Studies Series is intended to provide creative responses to critical pastoral issues in the life of today's Church.

The series features articles and reflections by Saint Meinrad faculty, staff and visiting lecturers on topics that touch the very heart of the Church's work in the 21st century. The series aims to reach those who are laboring diligently in these same ministries. Through these pages, we hope to provide some stimulus for critical thinking on important issues, as well as a source of intellectual and spiritual renewal for those dedicated to parish and diocesan life.





# I. Inaugural Address - October 4, 2008

Today we inaugurate the tenure of the 14th president-rector for this school of the Lord's service, Saint Meinrad School of Theology. We are privileged to do so in the presence of three of my predecessors, Archbishop Daniel, Fr. Eugene and Fr. Mark. My only other living predecessor cannot join us today, but we must be somewhat understanding, since Fr. Theodore is 107 years old.

Each of these men, in his own way, has contributed to the legacy of Saint Meinrad creatively, faithfully, productively. Each of them has also realized that Saint Meinrad is more than the vision of a single person, and so I hope that today is more than the inauguration of one person, but as all inaugurations must be, the opportunity to renew the charism of an institution, the spirit of a place, and the mission of a school that has served the Church for almost 150 years.

In those years, Saint Meinrad has fearlessly risen to meet the challenges that the Church has faced in good times and in not-so good times. Saint Meinrad has responded to the needs of the Body of Christ in countless large and small ways so that the mission of the Church, the evangelical mission of Christ, might be perpetuated to the ends of the earth.

Saint Meinrad has given thousands upon thousands of ministers to serve in places far and near to literally millions of men and women. It has weathered a great civil war, two world wars, two ecumenical councils, a great depression, the social upheaval of the '60s and thrived. What more can Saint Meinrad do? What more can it be?

I would like to begin my address this afternoon with a short reflection on the physical properties of sandstone. I know it seems like an odd beginning, but I hope it will make some sense, like

so many things in life, if we merely look around. What are the properties of sandstone?

The first one we might mention is that it is one of the most rapaciously absorbent building materials available. Everything soaks in. Building blocks of sandstone are etched with the rivulets of thousands of tempests and turmoil. For 150 years, these sandstone walls have soaked in rain and hail, soot and dust and about a million stories. If these walls could talk!

They would tell the stories of young, impressionable boys who were tossed off a wagon or a bus at the bottom of the hill and cried their first few nights away in a strange place. They would tell of adolescents struggling in the wee hours of the morning into a black cassock, or perhaps into the role it represented, as they headed off for silent hours of recollection. They would tell of discoveries of the deepest secrets of the human heart, its most impenetrable longings, its confusions, discernments and debilitations.

They would tell of triumph, of glory, of achievement, of anointing. They would conjugate a billion Latin verbs and a thousand lives. They would laugh and weep, rejoice and scream the limitless expressions of real men and women whose lives have been transformed. They bear scars, these walls, real scars. Sandstone absorbs and remembers.

The second property of sandstone is that it is malleable. You can carve it into anything. It yields to the tools of formation. It can be transformed into strong foundation blocks or beautiful sculpture. It is subtle and can be changed. It seems almost to change of its own volition over time. It can be made into anything.

The walls of this school have endured fire and flood, hurricane and winter snow and they have given. This school has expanded to include every kind of person under the sun. It has embraced people of countless cultures, myriads of ages, complexions, temperaments and intentions.

It has taken all of them in because sandstone is malleable; it changes with the times and the needs of the Church and the world. It becomes one thing for one generation and something else for the

next, remaining all the while resolutely itself. Sandstone shifts with the times. It is malleable.

Finally, sandstone is beautiful. It is beautiful because it is absorbent and malleable. It bears its scars well. In fact, its scars become a remarkable facet of its fabric. The walls of this school bear the unmistakable patina of experience, of hard knocks, of gentle caresses. The sandstone of the walls of this school is etched, richly etched, with the unmistakable palimpsests of idealism, promise and hope. It is the idealism of youth, the promise of the Church, the hope of Christ's cross.

The history of this institution is written in its walls, an absorbent, beautifully aged, malleable history. But these walls do not stand as bulwarks to a formless, ideal past. They stand rather as the prow of a great ship sailing confidently into the future. We build upon the past, we honor the past, we are distinguished by the past, but the past is gone and Saint Meinrad exists for today. And formation today, education today, is not without its challenges.

Inundated as we are in the utilitarian vision of education and, indeed, of life, we must take pause in the face of a past filled with so much bold idealism, so much promise and so much hope. In our modern world, we may often despair of what has been. We may lament that the great legacy of the Church is dead. We may decry that its message will fall on deaf ears, that, at least in Western culture, we no longer have the means of hearing the Gospel, much less of living it out.

Or, if we are to hear the Gospel, it must necessarily be a perverted Gospel, a commercialized, sanitized and soundbit Gospel. In spite of these cultural sirens, Saint Meinrad, firmly grounded in its past, remains committed to a set of truths that we have relentlessly pursued these many decades. It is these truths we must take into the future. It is my prayer, indeed it is my pledge, that the future of Saint Meinrad is solidly built upon these foundational truths, truths that we, their bearers, must now enunciate for a new generation.

The first of these truths is that people want to hear the Gospel and they want to hear the whole Gospel. In spite of what we may

be told, the clarion call of faith is not dead, nor does it sleep. The ears of humanity are tuned to hear its faint signals against the ever increasing uproar of its foes, the din of so-called civilized, cyberized existence.

In the recesses of the human heart, there is a yearning for meaning that only Christ can give. The challenge of preaching and teaching the Gospel message today is not so much the indifference of its hearers as the lack of fortitude in its preachers. As ministers of the Gospel, we give up, we despair, we count our weakness as loss.

In fact, we need to attend to the true voice of conscience that cannot be stilled in each of us and hear in that voice the cry for and of the unspeakable name of God, the name that leaps across the plains of generations and through the cacophonies of history, the name that utters its forceful syllable against the violence of wars, both external and internal, the name that is now, in the fullness of time, manifested in the blood-stained face of the Savior, in his searching eyes, in his patient voice entreating, admonishing us to do this, do all of this in memory of him.

Flannery O'Connor once remarked: For the deaf you must speak loudly, for the blind, you must draw big pictures. People want to hear the Gospel, they are dying for it and we must be willing to believe that call if the work we do here is to make any sense at all. This must be our primary value, the source and sustenance of our mission, our daily bread.

Why? Because this Gospel is the Truth. The great folly of the postmodern world is the perversion of Truth in radically devolving particularities. Truth cannot be determined by science alone. Truth cannot be established by economic legitimation alone. Truth cannot be sustained by language games alone, nor can it be merely the distillation of a social engagement that will inevitably, rapidly degenerate into a sociological contagion.

Rather, his Truth is firmly established in the heavens and it dictates to the earth, to quote the psalmist. Cardinal Newman remarked that people will never be satisfied with anything less than

certainty. People want to hear the Gospel and they want to hear the whole Gospel.

The second value we represent is that people want something challenging. They want to know that their life's quest is meaningful. People will devote themselves to a task if they recognize in that task the ultimate concern of the great adventure. People want to do something serious with their lives. Even in a death-dealing culture, there is a respect for life, a respect for the modicum of self-respect that cannot be robbed from us by commercialism and consumerism.

As Pope Benedict has said, "The knowledge of Christ is a path that demands the whole of our beings." People want to engage the fullness of living in the paths they pursue. The intensity of our mission is a product of the intimacy of what we encounter in the Eucharist, nothing less than the living God.

As the Holy Father has also noted, "The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate Logos, we enter into the very dynamic of his self giving." As Christ gives Himself in the Eucharist, completely and without compromise, so we are inspired to give all at the risk of compromising our understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist.

We want to be challenged and Saint Meinrad, to be true to its mission, must be a place where people are challenged, challenged to be disciples, men and women of the Eucharist, challenged to move beyond the mendacity of daily irritations, challenged to be saints.

The third value that we embody is the value of community. The culture of unrelenting secularity devolves into the culture of isolation, of the human person's increasing preoccupation with his personal loneliness. The long loneliness of the human condition ended with the sacrificial act of Christ on the cross; his blood draws us into a corporate reality. We are for each other. We cannot exist without each other.

As the late Pope John Paul remarked: we are made for one another, created for one another, bound for one another. Father Von Balthasar repeatedly remarked that the great fundamental lie of modern humanity is the loss of belief in the corporate subject,

the erroneous belief that we can do it on our own. As he said in his work *In the Fullness of Faith*, “The loss of ability to participate in the corporate subject signifies the direct loss of Catholic instinct. Where this instinct is absent, people settle for what can be known within the parameters of the world.”

If there is a message that Saint Meinrad must continually proclaim, it is that we are not alone. The bonds of this community, in good times and in bad, in joy and sorrow, hope and despair, teach the world a mighty lesson. These sandstone walls engulf us in a profound reality. We are here for each other. We are part of one another because we are part of Christ, brothers and sisters united in a common hope, not sojourners bound on other journeys.

We cannot witness this value by words alone. It must be witnessed in the very fabric of our being here, woven, knitted, quilted together into a mighty tapestry that convinces everyone who steps on this holy ground that love is still possible, that the witness of the disciples together in one place is still possible, that unity of heart and mind is still possible, that compassion is still possible.

If these are our values, then to what will Saint Meinrad commit itself in the coming years? First, we commit ourselves to the loving formation of each person who comes here. Vivified brains or ambulatory hearts are insufficient in themselves to fulfill the great task before us. We must be people of clear heads and holy hearts. The task of ministry must touch every fiber of their being.

Saint Meinrad must be a place where people leave better than when they came, regardless of the outcome of their formation. Saint Meinrad is a place to form ministers, who likewise respond to the whole person, the whole community, because they themselves are whole beings. Human formation is the bedrock of what we do.

As Pope John Paul remarked in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, if our human development is neglected or disregarded, then “the work of formation is deprived of its necessary foundation.” The minister who is intelligent without emotional maturity is no minister; the minister who is good and kind but unable to explain the basic tenets of faith

is no minister. Priests, deacons, lay ministers today are those who can bring the often-disparate strains of the song of postmodern man into harmony. The minister today is a harbinger of harmony. We can accept nothing less.

Second, we commit ourselves to formation as a way of living. Saint Meinrad is not a place to prepare ministers. It is a place to be ministers. It is not a place to train future disciples. It is a place to live discipleship. We are already into the work of ministry when we step on this hill. We learn to live with one another, put up with one another, take care of one another, love one another.

We learn that the first lesson of ministry is to be here. We learn to be truly present to one another, to uphold one another, to appreciate one another. This is a school of charity. This is a school of consideration. This is a school of mercy. This is a school of being for the other.

In this regard, we also commit ourselves to the pursuit of intelligence. The obligation to be intelligent is, as Lionel Trilling has noted, a moral obligation. In Christian ministry, it is even more so. Saint Meinrad has been blessed through the years with excellent faculty members, men and women fully committed to the Gospel and to preparing quality ministers for the Church. That is a gift from God.

As Archbishop Sheen noted in *The Priest is Not His Own*: “The intellect of the priest is bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty. Our faith is the satisfaction of the soul’s desire, not the didactic presentation of a syllogism.” The intellectual must meet the pastoral if true theological education is to take place.

Cardinal Newman remarks:

This process of training, by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for the sake of others, for the perception of its proper object, and for its highest culture; it is the standard of excellence.

Third, and most significantly, we commit ourselves to prayer. The

truth of all this frantic action only comes home in the intimacy of a life inundated with prayer. Prayer is our communion, our living breath, our blood. It connects us to the source of who we are, as Fr. Guardini remarked: “Prayer creates that open, moving world, transfused by energy and regulated by reason. Behind it is the history of all cultures, interwoven with humanity. It is an arch of the sacred room of revelation where the Truth of the living God is made known to us.”

Prayer is our way of life and unites all of the varying actions of our lives together into a living edifice, a solid wall of stone, stone that is malleable, absorbent and beautiful. I cannot lead this school except on my knees. Our staff and faculty cannot do what they do, except on their knees. We cannot learn except humbly on our knees. We will be a community on our knees, in perpetual adoration of the source of our being, in fundamental thanksgiving for the gifts we have received in every heartbeat, in every word spoken, in every act of love.

If we can do that, then we will fulfil the goal of our existence. As Helen Keller once said: “It is for us to pray not for tasks equal to our powers, but for powers equal to our tasks, to go forward with a great desire forever beating at the door of our hearts as we travel toward our distant goal.”

Finally, in all of these things, we commit ourselves to excellence, the Greek virtue of *arête*. Excellence in all things is our goal and our guide. Excellence in the great arcs of formation and in the minute details of daily existence. Excellence, in our context, cannot be accidental. It is purposeful and driven. It must be the reason for our living.

Each person here, no matter what role he or she may fulfill, is called to fulfill that role with integrity and excellence. Excellence that is habitual, continual and purposeful fulfills in us, as individuals and as a community of faith, a sense of self-esteem worthy of the dignity of the sons and daughters of God.

Mediocrity, half-heartedness, a spirit of the mundane have no place at Saint Meinrad. We are called to nothing less than the



excellence of sanctity, growing in holiness and fulfilling our destiny in Christ. In this pursuit, we cannot doubt that the great legacy of the Church is alive. We can be assured that the message of the Gospel will fall on anxious ears, that we will have the means of hearing the Gospel and living it out in the daily joys of discipleship.

Why? Why to all of this effort, all of this commitment? Because the Church deserves the best priests and permanent deacons and lay ministers. The Church deserves intelligent, healthy, creative, prayerful, loving ministers. The Church deserves ministers who can work with them and for them in evangelizing our world about the Good News we preach.

And when the Church has quality ministers, the faithful are enriched, built up like living blocks of stone, strong and beautiful, able to weather the vicissitudes of these tumultuous times, stones of living faith built into a solid temple. That is Saint Meinrad.

Twenty years ago this summer, a 25-year-old man drove up this hill. He was young, energetic, a little scared, thin and had lots of hair. He was trying something, trying his vocation as a priest. He was unsure, nervous but also full of hope. It didn't take long for the blessings, the mystery, of Saint Meinrad to take hold in that young man's life. He lived within these sandstone walls.

He prayed, he learned, he worked, he cried, he argued, he became frustrated, he was consoled, he pleaded with God, he laughed, he made friends for a lifetime and he became attached to a place, Saint Meinrad, a place that was ultimately not only a school and a place to learn the skills of ministry, but a home. He was transformed by Saint Meinrad. Saint Meinrad made him the man he would become. Twenty years later, that energetic, scared, thin and hopeful young man has become the 14th president-rector of this School of Theology. But my story is not an unusual story; in fact, my story is a story I hear every day.

One of the great privileges of my new work is to hear how Saint Meinrad has made a difference, a *real* difference in the lives of so many men and women around the world. It is a privilege to know that we are still preaching the Gospel, that we are still providing the

challenge of people's lives, that we are still doing that in the cradling boughs of community life.

It is a privilege to have you here this weekend, not to celebrate the 14th president-rector, but to celebrate our school, our *alma mater*, this unique and holy place called Saint Meinrad. God bless you for your presence and your patience. Pray for us as we pray for you each day. God keep you. Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

## 2. The Diakonia of Truth: The Thought of John Henry Newman and the Life of the Seminary in the Third Millennium - Opening Conference, Fall 2008

Brothers and sisters, welcome to a new formation year. We are truly blessed this year to welcome so many new students, both seminarians and lay students, as well as our returning students. God has truly touched our lives with his amazing bounty. We will all have the opportunity to be a blessing for one another.

During his recent pastoral visit to the United States, Pope Benedict had the opportunity to address the presidents of Catholic colleges and universities at Catholic University of America. In the course of that talk, the Holy Father observed that the crisis of faith, so prevalent in contemporary Western culture, is very much a product of what he terms the crisis of truth.

Who of us engaged in the daily task of pastoral care can doubt that the crisis of faith is real? Mass attendance is dropping. Celebration of the sacraments is decreasing. The Church in the U.S. has been sorely tested in its challenge to meet the spiritual needs of a changing demographic profile. Vocations continue to be unstable. More philosophically, Catholics are less likely to either understand or believe central tenets of the faith.

According to Pope Benedict, the malaise of faith we experience in our culture today is ultimately tied to a crisis of truth. In a postmodern cultural and political environment, the crisis of truth is

acute. Nothing is held as definitive and true, nothing seen as lasting or even crucial. The cult of relativism has so inundated our common thinking that even the most spiritually aware Christians cannot help but experience its ramifications in an intense and personal way.

In the midst of this crisis, however, there is a beacon of hope. This hope lies in the very nature of the human person as one who seeks the Truth. We want to know the Truth, even when we no longer have the language to speak of this longing or when the structures of our culture cannot support it.

We desire the Truth, and when we earnestly seek Truth, we will invariably discover the source of that Truth, Jesus Christ. The Church then, and particularly its houses of formation, must remain in the service of Truth, the *diakonia* of Truth. The Holy Father's choice of the Greek word *diakonia* to describe this mission is telling. It is an active, rather than reflective, term.

Service in the loose sense requires us to do something. The *diakonia* of Truth is a call to action, a call to work for a better world through bold proclamation and tangible work. It is a call to renewal, a call to a new renaissance of belief, a clarion call for us to take up the mantle of evangelization and be proud of our Catholic heritage, our spiritual treasures, our theological foundations.

Many of the pope's reflections on these questions are drawn from the Holy Father's extensive study of the philosophical and theological works of John Henry Newman. Of course, I have rather a decided preference for the work of Newman myself. Newman offers us insight into the nature of this understanding of the *diakonia* of Truth, and, by extension, our formational apostolate in this School of the Lord's Service.

In my presentation today, I would like first to comment on Newman's understanding of the nature of Truth, and then to apply these principles to our work at Saint Meinrad. This last section will hopefully form a kind of manifesto for my vision of the future of the School of Theology. First, Newman.

### **The Pursuit of Truth in the Thought of John Henry Newman**

The public career of John Henry Newman, in many ways, can be

summarized as the pursuit of the rather biblical question: What is Truth? Newman worked and taught in a time not unlike our own, when the very foundations of knowledge and the very possibility of Truth were being called into question by developments in philosophy, the natural sciences, culture and politics.<sup>1</sup>

Reflections on Truth pervade all of the works of Newman. His great philosophical work, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, is his most systematic, but certainly not his first contribution to this area of thought.<sup>2</sup> Newman's treatment of Truth is also significantly presented in his landmark work *The Idea of a University*, which was originally published in 1854.

Newman's creative contribution to our understanding of the pursuit of Truth has four distinct components. The first is the somewhat simplistic insight that Truth is complex. The second is that the pursuit of Truth is always imbued with a moral aspect, a place in a life of action. In other words, knowledge is not passive; it has consequences.

The third is that Truth is a product not of individual and isolated reflection, but of the life and vigor of the community. And the fourth is that Truth, in its ultimate sense, is a particular Christian truth.

First, Truth is complex. Truth, for Newman, begins with the

1. For a detailed, if somewhat colorful and at times biased, account of 19th-century religious thought see: Wilson, A. N. (1999) *God's Funeral*, Little, Brown and Company, London. See also Qualls, B. (2000) In *A Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (Ed, Levine, G.) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 119-138.
2. The best commentary on this seminal work is Merrigan, T. (1991) *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman*, Peeters Press, Louvain.

insight that nothing comes to us immediately and directly; we have to work for what we know. Coming to know something is a process that involves a great complexity of insights, some rational and scientific, some historical, some emotional, and some whose origin may remain mysterious.

In other words: "The idea which represents an object or supposed object is commensurate with the sum total of its possible aspects, however they may vary in the separate consciousness of individuals."<sup>3</sup> For Newman, this development involves a kind of peripatetic process, that is, a *purposeful* consideration and reconsideration of various points of view and opinions from various disciplines.

Some of the factors that contribute to this walking around an object include abstract definitions and notions. In the Christian context, these certainly include specific doctrines and teachings of the faith. But knowledge of Christianity, as knowledge of anything, is not merely the grasping of abstract concepts. Truth, then, for Newman is always the product of an elaborate process of construction:

There is no one aspect deep enough to exhaust the contents of Truth, no one term or proposition which will serve to define it.<sup>4</sup>

For Newman, this desire for Truth was a natural instinct in the human person. It necessitates a kind of formation, which extends beyond cognition and presses on to a reality that cannot be reduced to the simplistic categories of argumentation. As Newman says in *The Idea of a University*:

We know, not by a direct and simple vision, not at a

3. Newman, J. H. (1845) *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. 35.

4. *Ibid.* 36.

glance, but, as it were, by piecemeal and accumulation, by a mental process, by going round an object, by the comparison, the combination, the mutual correction, the continual adaptation, of many partial notions, by the employment, concentration and joint action of many faculties and exercises of the mind.<sup>5</sup>

If this is the way knowledge is attained, the process of formation must somehow emulate and facilitate this process. This is the essence of formation, a process built up over time and strengthened by accumulation. There is a subtlety in the construction of Truth that is illusive to those who strive for easy answers.

Truth is complex because the world is complex and the God who created the world is complex and, therefore, it is not only foolish but futile to seek simple answers in the face of overwhelming complexity. Indeed, all simple and straightforward answers will be intuited by the person as shallow and useless.

In several places in his vast writings, Newman contrasts this complex pursuit of Truth with the spirit of heresy, a spirit all simple and straightforward. For Newman, heresy, and indeed all sin, is a failure of the imagination, a failure, in a sense, to shake things up and to realize this complexity. It is a kind of “bad faith” that chooses ready-made answers to complex questions over the inconvenience of living into mystery. “The world overcomes us, not merely by appealing to our reason, or by exciting our passions, but by imposing on our imagination.”<sup>6</sup> Orthodoxy, on the other hand, is precisely the triumph of imagination.

Second, the acquisition of Truth for Newman is never passive, as

5. Newman, J. H. (1852) *The Idea of a University*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. 152.
6. Newman, J. H. (1868) *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. 123.

the writing on a *tabula rasa*. Rather it is attained through a sense of *earnestness* in the seeker. “It is obvious that to be in earnest in seeking the truth is an indispensable requisite for finding it.”<sup>7</sup> The pursuit of Truth produces *restlessness* in the seeker that cannot be satisfied and yet the perception of the object as something great, indeed ultimate, generates the energy for further pursuit.

For Newman, authentic ideas and truths must be what he termed “living”: “When an idea, whether real or not, is of a nature to arrest and possess the mind, it may be said to have life, that is, to live in the mind which is its recipient.”<sup>8</sup>

Knowledge worth having is generated not through the processes of syllogistic Reason, or in the armchair reflections of amateur philosophers, but in the lived experience, that is, the daily activity of the person. Truth is not an isolated pursuit, but one that unfolds in every aspect of the human person.

The witness of experience, the vicissitudes of youth, the example of other people, the chance encounter with nature, a powerful experience of art, the poetic imagination, all of these have the same power to inform as the pages of a book. All of these things are assimilated over time, often in ways we control, manipulate and understand, but often as a result of simply *being in the world*.

As Pope Benedict remarks: “Truth means more than knowledge; knowing the Truth leads us to discover the Good.”<sup>9</sup> There are no truths that are *simply* good to know. The perception of Truth changes lives; it necessitates conversion and movement, which, in

7. Ibid. 8.

8. Newman, J. H. (1845) *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. 37.

9. Pope Benedict XVI, *Address to the Presidents of Catholic Colleges and Universities*, Washington, DC. 2008.



turn, propels the learner, the believer, toward increasing knowledge and Truth. If such an energy is lacking, we do not know the Truth.

Third, for Newman, the pursuit of Truth always takes place within the context of the community. Truth, for Newman, is never privatized. It needs the presence of others to inspire and augment its development. It thrives only in a critical and mutually corrective atmosphere. Just as the perception of Truth necessitates action, so this action necessarily has ramifications in the life of the community.

Here his stance is in direct opposition to that of the enthusiastic religion of his evangelical contemporaries. There is no privatized Revelation or Truth. "Truth is not the heritage of any individual, it is absolute and universal; mankind ought to seek and profess it in common."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, for Newman, Truth can be acquired only in a context. Therefore, in Newman's estimation, there is always the need to, in a sense, "grow where one is planted." That is to say, the community provides the proper arena for growth and there is no need to look beyond it for confirmation of the Truth, yet unrevealed.

Finally, the fullness of Truth is manifested in the active living of a life of faith. Secular learning and institutions of education can benefit from Newman's insights only to a certain point, because Newman was convinced that the fullness of Truth is not open to all. Indeed, "She refuses to reveal her mysteries to those who come otherwise than in the humble and reverential spirit of learners and disciples."<sup>11</sup>

Truth, however, is instinctual in the hearts of those who believe and practice faith. Faith, Christian belief and practice, however, are not to be understood as another aspect of knowledge, or even of

10. Newman, J. H. (1845) *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. 51.

11. *Ibid.* 10.

the highest knowledge. For Newman, Christianity is the ground of knowledge. For Newman, the object of pursuit in the context of Christian faith is the Truth of the divine reality, the central aspect of which is the matter and form of revelation.

God as divine reality is, in Newman's estimation, not only the source of Truth, but the only goal of Truth finally worth pursuit. This in no way denigrates any other branch or discipline of learning; in fact, it enhances the disciplines by making them essential components in the construction of the Great Truth, the divine reality.

But herein lies the paradox for Newman. The nature of this divine reality is its very inexhaustibility, that is, what we know when we know God is the infinite itself and pursuit of God is the ultimate pursuit in that it can never be exhausted. What it yields is the same paradox one encounters in education. For the educated person, the more one knows, the more one knows what one does not know. The horizons shift and the pursuit is endless.

The paradox of God is the same. The more the believer "knows" God, the greater, deeper and broader the divine reality becomes. God is not something to be grasped; rather God is the energy, as it were, of grasping, one with which to be in relationship.

"[This pursuit of God] becomes an active principle within [believers], leading them to an ever-new contemplation of itself, to an application of it in various directions, and a propagation of it on every side."<sup>12</sup> In this way, the Incarnation, with its inherent and irresolvable tension, becomes the central teaching of Christianity, the core of its parabolic life.

The Incarnation [is] the central aspect of Christianity, out of which the three main aspects of its teaching take their rise, the sacramental, the hierarchical, and the ascetic. But

12. Newman, J. H. (1845) *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Longmans, Green and Co., London. 37.

one aspect of Revelation must not be allowed to exclude or to obscure another; and Christianity is dogmatical, devotional, practical all at once; it is esoteric and exoteric; it is indulgent and strict; it is light and dark; it is love, and it is fear.<sup>13</sup>

Newman understands Truth as complex, active, communitarian and, necessarily, Christian. How do these insights touch upon our work here at Saint Meinrad?

### **The *Diakonia* of Truth**

Newman's life's work was the relentless pursuit of Truth. His energy, his intellect, his creativity were all at the service of this Truth. He lived and died by this Truth and this Truth had a name. Jesus Christ. How does this *diakonia* of Truth translate into our context?

In our School of Theology, how do we serve the Truth? My observations here concern this school, but they might apply to any school or parish or diocese in the world, if fact, everywhere that Christ is proclaimed as Lord, which is, of course, everywhere.

First, I would say that we must constantly keep before our eyes the primary mission of the school. The mission statement to serve the Church through the quality formation of priests, permanent deacons and lay ministers is, ultimately, at the service of a greater mission and that is the primacy of the evangelical charge: "Go forth and baptize all nations."

The first mission of this school is to save souls by drawing them ever more profoundly into the life of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the reason for this school. We are at the service of this primary mission. Everything we do here, everything we say, the very fiber of our buildings and our beings must be intentionally driven by this goal. We must have a zeal for souls if this school is to succeed.

In all that we say and do, we must maintain a constant vigilance that the great goal of our lives, expressed by St. Paul in the letter

13. *Ibid.* 37.

to the Galatians, “It is not I who live but Christ who lives in me,” is fulfilled. We can be the best educators, the best preachers, the best administrators, but if we do not live ever more deeply into Christ, we have failed to provide the world what it most deeply needs and we have failed to be honest about who we truly are.

The *diakonia* of Truth necessitates that the first things remain first. As Pope Benedict remarks: “Every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and Truth.”<sup>14</sup>

Second, growth is not optional. John Henry Newman’s understanding of Truth, as presented here, requires a constant search and a constant outlook for opportunities for growth. Our Benedictine spiritual heritage likewise proclaims this in the monastic vow of *conversatio*, conversion.

For the disciple of Jesus, conversion is not optional. What is true for the disciple is likewise true for the institution. Stagnancy is not a quality of discipleship. Resting on one’s laurels offers no tribute to the God who is constantly calling us to greater depth of relationship, greater heights of spiritual insight. Our mission in this school is to respond to the needs of the Church.

The Church is the living body of Christ and, for Newman, “to live is to change.”<sup>15</sup> In our times, this is an increasing challenge. Globalization, new technologies of communication and a vast infrastructure of relationship promote an almost constant alternation in the landscape of the Catholic Church.

We are called to respond to exponentially expanding challenges. In this regard, the School of Theology that is not staying five years ahead of the learning curve is already behind. The men and women who are preparing for service in the Church today will find, when

14. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter: *Spe Salvi*, 4.

15. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 206.

they leave Saint Meinrad, a very different Church even from the one they live in now.

In the divine economy, when we are satisfied with what we have attained, then we must remark that what we have attained is not the living God, but an idol. The seminary that grasps tenaciously to past structures, past programs, past ideals is worshipping the false idol of nostalgia and not the living God.

If we are to invoke the signs of the times, then we must be willing to attend to the signs of the times and not live as though we are immured in past decades. No matter how febrile those eras were, they are past. As the author William Faulkner once remarked: The past is not dead, it isn't even past, if it is pointing to the horizon and not to the trenches. Pope Benedict says: "God's love can only unleash its power when it is allowed to change us from within ... Only then can we let it ignite our imaginations and shape our deepest desires."<sup>16</sup>

Third, while change is not optional, likewise, change for the sake of change is not desirable. Sensitivity and receptivity are necessary components of the *diakonia* of Truth. "God's revelation offers every generation the opportunity to discover the ultimate truth about its own life and the goal of history"<sup>17</sup> These words of Pope Benedict acknowledge the necessity of understanding what is happening in the Church, and not only understanding but being receptive to the action of the Holy Spirit.

Past generations had particular needs, particular outlooks, a unique vision of the Church. Because the Church is a living body, these particularities do not negate in any way the Church's universal message or the solidity of its Tradition. As the pope says, every

16. Pope Benedict XVI, World Youth Day 2008: Eucharistic Celebration, Origenes, v. 38:11, August 14, 2008.

17. Pope Benedict XVI. Address to the Presidents of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

generation responds differently to the Truth, making it beautifully its own, embracing it in its own arms.

In our present Church, for example, we live with a number of tensions regarding what we might term generational preferences and interests. In his homily for World Youth Day, Pope Benedict asked an important question: “What will you leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure?”<sup>18</sup>

It is a question for every generation. They must build and they must build on their terms. Succeeding generations, if we are truly to maintain our ecclesial identity, must be sensitive to and respond to the voices of the young. Here is what the Holy Father charged the youth with in the same homily: “The Lord is asking you to be prophets of this new age. Messengers of his love, drawing people to the Father and building a future of hope for all humanity.”<sup>19</sup>

They will do it in a totally unique and compelling way. Let me put it bluntly. Young Catholics today do not think about the Church in the same way as their spiritual parents. A sensitivity to the signs of the times means listening to their voices and hearing in those voices agents of the new evangelization. But it also means a true respect on the part of the young for the wisdom of older generations.

Sensitivity and response to new ecclesial realities, be they generational or hierarchical or theological or pastoral, ensures that the necessity of conversion has direction and that direction is toward the mission goal of evangelization. That conversion and that direction are always within the context of respectful relationships. When charity breaks down in a community, Truth is no longer served.

18. Pope Benedict XVI, World Youth Day 2008: Eucharistic Celebration.

19. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 206.

What is necessary to attain this sensitivity and receptivity? In the words of St. Paul, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil. May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.”<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, we must realize that everything is formation. As John Henry Newman points out in his observations on the nature of Truth, every truth intersects with every other truth. As Pope Benedict observes: “Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more: namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberates within the ecclesial life of faith.”

All pursuits of Truth have consequences and form a divine matrix, which supports and sustains not only authentic discipleship, but authentic humanity. The crisis of faith, as Pope John Paul pointed out in the *Theology of the Body*, is also a crisis of the human person. Human persons in a postmodern world feel isolated not only from their environment, and from each other, but also from disparate aspects of themselves.

The integration of the person necessitates the eradication of any vestiges of internal schizophrenias that divide the human persons into spiritual, social, intellectual and political units, operating as it were on parallel tracks. If there is a byproduct of the crisis of faith and the crisis of Truth, it is the anthropological subdivision that allows us to separate ourselves into manageable units.

But this is alien to the human person; it is destructive. If we seek integration in the person, we must also mirror that integration in the institution. Everything is formation. Pope Benedict makes the following observation: “Being ‘sealed with the Spirit’ means not

20. I Thes. 5:19-22.

being afraid to stand up for Christ, letting the truth of the Gospel permeate the way we see, think and act as we work for the triumph of the civilization of love.”<sup>21</sup>

If true unity in society can never be founded upon relationships that deny the equal dignity of the other persons, then no stone can be left unturned in rooting out even the most obscure aspects of our common life that send mixed messages about the efficacy of the Gospel charge.

The way we study, the way we live, the way we pray, the way we worship, the way we recreate, the way we serve, the way we eat, the way we communicate, all of these disparate elements must form a seamless garment of evangelical purpose. The principle that everything is formation challenges us, as a school, to examine our lives and our work to root out even the most inadvertent hypocrisies.

This is a particular insight of the Benedictine ethos of Saint Meinrad. In the holy *Rule*, we are told that the vessels of common work should be treated with the same dignity as the vessels of the altar. We attend again to the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians: “Whatever you do in thought, word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving glory to God the Father through him.”<sup>22</sup>

As Pope Benedict writes: “The public witness to the way of Christ, as found in the Gospel and upheld by the Church’s Magisterium, shapes all aspects of an institution’s life, both inside and outside the classroom.” Here we find a decided intersection between the orientation of our faculty toward the *munus docendi* and their concomitant orientation toward the *munus sancficicandi*. Our duty to teach and our duty to sanctify is one duty in service to the Truth.

21. Pope Benedict XVI, World Youth Day 2008: Eucharistic Celebration.

22. Col. 3:17.



Finally, I would like to point to a virtue, which, in my opinion, ties the whole together. In many ways, I would like to propose this single word as a hallmark of what we have achieved and what we can continue to achieve in the pursuit of the *diakonia* of Truth. It is the Greek word *arête*. Loosely translated, it means habitual excellence. *Arête* is a significant part of the *paideia* of ancient Greeks: the training from childhood to maturity.

This training in *arête* included: physical training, mental training, moral training and spiritual training. It was, in short, the preparation of the whole person for the assumption of authentic humanity. Excellence, in our context, cannot be accidental. It is purposeful and driven.

Each person here, no matter what role he or she may fulfill, is called to fulfill that role with integrity and excellence. Excellence that is habitual, continual and purposeful fulfills in us, as individuals and as a community of faith, a sense of self-esteem worthy of the dignity of the sons and daughters of God.

Mediocrity, half-heartedness, a spirit of mendacity have no place at Saint Meinrad. We are called to nothing less than the excellence of sanctity, growing in holiness and fulfilling our destiny in Christ. I would like to repeat some remarks I made to our new seminarians a few days ago. I think they bear repeating in that they summarize much of what I have said: In welcoming you back to this faith community – whether you are a seminarian, lay student, professor or staff member – I am welcoming you into the greatest challenge of your lives. I join you in this challenge. It is the challenge to become truly who we are, to become nothing less than saints. I am challenging us to become saints.

Can we achieve it? No *we* cannot, but God can achieve it through us and in us. His grace is sufficient for us. His grace is sufficient for this school. God has called us here today, to begin this new year, this new chapter in our lives. God has called us and God does not give us a vocation that He does not give us the grace and freedom to live.

Our task here is to fearlessly proclaim the Truth of the Catholic faith with excellence. When this spirit of *arête* permeates this

school and the minds and hearts of all who live, study, pray and serve here, then we can change the world. By the grace of God, we can change the world. The crisis of faith means nothing, nothing at all, in the face of fully committed Christians dedicated as we are to the *diaknoia* of Truth.

My brothers and sisters, our new formation year is under way. I am humbled to be your rector. I am proud of this School of Theology, its faculty, staff and its students. God has given us much, and to those to whom much has been given, much will be expected. Let us begin in his grace under the protection of Our Lady, the Seat of Wisdom.

### 3. Best Practices for Human Formation - 2008

In my conferences for this formation term, I am focusing on the “best practices” for priestly formation. In today’s conference, I would like to spend some time offering a rather extended reflection on the “best practices” of human formation.

Human formation is certainly a basic of what we do here. At Saint Meinrad, I would say that we have given this dimension of priestly formation particular emphasis and not without just cause. Often, we have heard the injunction of our late Holy Father Blessed John Paul II that the personality of the priest forms an effective bridge to the possibility of ministry.

The pope’s words in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* give us insight into how we must initially proceed in seminary formation. “The priest, who is called to be a ‘living image’ of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God.” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43)

As a bridge, the priest must understand the dynamics of his own life and personality as well as any man can. He must know what motivates him and what he finds life-giving. These insights are not always at the surface of the human personality and are not always evident in a pronounced way in the daily engagements of seminary and priestly life.

In my reflections today, reflections that I hope will take us back to the basics of priestly formation and give us some new insights in doing so, I would like to focus on the qualities of the human personality that I see as essential for quality formation to take place. All authentic human persons display these qualities, even if they may need to be engaged more explicitly in the work of seminary formation.

St. Ireneus famously commented that the glory of God was the human person fully alive. This certainly seems to be an insight in keeping with the message of Blessed John Paul II. We might paraphrase by saying that the work of evangelization is accomplished readily, even passively, through the expression of authentic human living. Is the new evangelization, that is, the re-evangelization of the holy Church, dependent in our age on reclaiming authentic humanity? I would say that undoubtedly it is.

What are the essential qualities of authentic human being? First, I would say a kind of groundedness; second, an authentic generativity; and finally, a sense of gratitude.

First, I would say that the well-formed human personality is grounded. This groundedness is related to the spiritual practice of humility. Humility is a virtue often misread in the life of the Church and even more so in the world. Our social climate promotes pride, even a false pride, in one's accomplishments. The social order tells us to do what it takes, even to the point of lying about ourselves, to achieve the ends that that same social order has established as the authentic markers of success, wealth, power and popularity.

The great teachers of our spiritual tradition, however, speak of a need to cultivate the virtue of humility as the antidote to the ills of the age. In the words of St. Therese of Avila, "We shall never learn to know ourselves except by endeavoring to know God; for, beholding His greatness, we realize our own littleness; His purity shows us our foulness; and by meditating upon His humility we find how very far we are from being humble."

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict has remarked:

Do not follow the path of pride, rather, follow the path of humility. Go against the current trend: do not listen to the persuasive and biased chorus of voices that today form much of the propaganda of life, drenched in arrogance and violence, in dominance and success at all costs, where appearance and possession to the detriment of others is openly promoted.

What is this humility to which our Tradition testifies? It is simply

telling the Truth about one's self. Humility is being grounded in the Truth. When we speak of the new evangelization as a re-evangelization, we must speak the Truth about the Church, about its condition in our local communities, about its condition in my heart and soul.

Humility requires that I tell the Truth about myself to myself, that I stop presenting false images about my piety, my holiness, my worth to myself, whether those images are inflated or whether they are detracting. Spiritual pride is expressed in hypocrisy, that is, trying to convince myself and others that I am better than I am. Spiritual pride is also expressed in lies about my self-worth, my failures and my lack of virtue.

Humility is telling the Truth for good or ill. And when we know the Truth, it will set us free. When we acknowledge the Truth, we are already expressing a new evangelization in our lives. Ultimately, this Truth reveals to us that we cannot effectively preach to the nations what we ourselves are unwilling to admit and ultimately believe.

Knowledge of self is therefore essential to fulfilling the evangelical commission. We can hardly expect the nations to listen when we ourselves have become confounded internally by the cacophony of false messages presented by culture, social conditioning and the persistent voice of false ego.

When we learn to tell the Truth about ourselves, one thing is revealed. We are not alone. We are not only in the presence of others, we need others. Blessed John Paul II said:

Of special importance is the capacity to relate to others. This is truly fundamental for a person who is called to be responsible for a community and to be a "man of communion." This demands that the priest not be arrogant, or quarrelsome, but affable, hospitable, sincere in his words and heart, prudent and discreet, generous and ready to serve, capable of opening himself to clear and brotherly relationships and of encouraging the same in others, and quick to understand, forgive and console." (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43)

An essential aspect of the new evangelization, both internal and external, is the reawakening of the need for reference to the other. The human person is a social being. We have lost this insight by too close attention to the ranting of the false philosophers of individualism and atomism. To quote the poet John Donne: “No man is an island, entire of himself.” We know this when we are humble enough to be honest. We desire to reach out to others when we realize that those embracing arms are also embracing our truest selves.

When Blessed John Paul II speaks about the nuptial meaning of the body and affective maturity, he is proposing to an age inebriated with false messages of isolation, the essential truth that lies in the heart of each one, the truth of our need for one another. The maturity we seek to authentically exercise the holy priesthood is affective maturity and that affect cannot be directed toward the contemplation of self.

Affect that only loves the self as an object is narcissism. True love always considers the other. We only penetrate the truth of the human mystery in the presence of others. Our brothers and sisters are an essential part of our mystery. This is the new evangelization and an insight as ancient as the seventh day of creation.

Grounded means knowing who I am and how I am, that is, I am always in the presence of others. Going back now to the business model proposed at the onset of these reflections: What are the best practices for human formation? Practically speaking, how can we achieve our goals in making the priest an authentic bridge through his human personality?

We might begin with the acknowledgement and cultivation of true friendships. Many of us have experienced a new awakening of friendship in the life of the seminary. I have made lifelong friends among my former classmates and now fellow priests. Many of us learn, in a very different way, the true meaning of friendship here that is grounded, not only in common interests and fellow feelings, but in an authentic spiritual bond that we often gain only in the context of formation.

Friendships often become deeper and more profound in seminary and priestly life. We depend upon our friends as authentic markers of our ability to reach out to others and as true barometers of authenticity in ourselves. Friends confide in each other. They challenge each other. They support each other, often through common activities and pursuits and often by being authentic mirrors to the reality of the pursuit of vocation.

Friends help me in discernment. They do this because they know me deeply. They know me deeply because I have shared deeply with them. Friends pray together and are not embarrassed about the spiritual aspects of their relationship. Friends put up with one another, as St. Benedict says, by bearing their weaknesses of body and spirit and personality.

Authentic friendship is a true act of humility and, therefore, a truly divine act. The ability to make and maintain authentic friendships is a sign of the seminarian's ability to be true to the vocation of being configured in Christ, who said to his disciples, "I no longer call you servants for a servant does not know the mind of his master. I call you friends" (John 15:15). Friends learn from one another. They lean on one another. Friends love one another in affective maturity. In the context of a celibate house of formation, friendship is a true and authentic expression of sexual integration. As Pope John Paul has mentioned:

We are speaking of a love that involves the entire person, in all his or her aspects – physical, psychic and spiritual – and which is expressed in the “nuptial meaning” of the human body, thanks to which a person gives oneself to another and takes the other to oneself. (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 44)

Because the friendships that we develop here are true and deep, we feel their loss more keenly when a friend decides that formation as a priest is no longer his calling. There is great sadness in this loss of daily society and the support we feel in our meaningful friendships. The sense of loss is real, however. It is a sign, indeed a sacrament, of the gap formed in the life of every celibate person.

Our keen experience of that loss is also a blessing. It demonstrates

to us that we have gained the ability to cultivate loving friendships and thus we can do it again and again. In the old days, we often spoke in religious communities of particular friendships, that is, intimate relationships that were exclusive. Obviously, this can be detrimental not only to the individuals, but also to the life of the community. However, the ability to make deeply committed friends is positive, so I say, have particular friends, only have many of them.

Another best practice in human formation in a seminary is counseling. I am a firm believer in the power of counseling to make a profound difference in the life of the seminarian and the future priest. In my seminary formation, I frequently had recourse to our counseling center. It is a productive way of carrying out one's formation.

Even today, I occasionally see the need to visit with one of the sisters. Even the rector cannot always be right. Even the rector needs another head, another opinion, another voice. Counseling is a relationship that assists us in asking the right questions and seeking the right answers in areas such as relationships, sexual identity, public personality, addictive and compulsive behaviors, etc.

Often, new seminarians are referred to see one of our counselors. This does not mean that something is wrong; it means that something could be better. That holds true for everyone in this room today. Every seminarian, indeed every faculty member and administrator, can benefit from the periodic use of our counseling center.

We are truly blessed at Saint Meinrad by our dedicated and professional sisters. They have devoted their lives to our service here. They have taught us the central place that counseling has in the world of modern seminary formation, as was evidenced by the John Jay Report that appeared this past summer. Seeking counseling is not weak; it is responsible. It is responsible to do everything in our power to make ourselves the best men and the best priests we can be.

I know that there is also some cultural bias against mental health care. While understandable within particular cultural contexts, it is



necessary for priests working in this country to be comfortable with the process of counseling, not only for themselves, but for those whom they will serve.

Another best practice in being a grounded person is acquiring appropriate manners and etiquette skills. My grandmother was a great lady of manners and she had a saying that, in the innocence of my youth, I never quite understood. She said, "Anyone who would put a fork into a piece of bread would kill a man." At first, I considered her observations about correct behavior to be a bit over the top.

I have come to realize, however, that, first and foremost, the priest is a gentleman and there are two tried-and-true rules for a gentleman's behavior. One is that he behaves like a gentleman at all times, even when no one is around to see him. Two is that he presumes that everyone he meets is a lady or a gentleman as well and he treats them as such.

G. K. Chesterton once said of Charles Dickens that he was a great man because the mark of a great man is that he makes other men feel great. Truer words were never spoken. Being a gentleman requires consideration, consideration of my own behavior and words and their impact upon those around me and consideration of others.

This also requires a good bit of forethought. Being a gentleman is not an act; it is a habit and, as such, comes second nature to us. For priests, we might say that being a gentleman is pastoral. Correct manners involve who we are as priests. Far from being unmanly, the rules of etiquette teach us how to be real men.

Another best practice for groundedness is what I might call a functional extroversion. All of us have different personalities. Statistics show that many who are attracted to various forms of religious life are introverts by nature. Natural introspection is a gift that helps nourish our lives of prayer.

Being a public minister in the Church, however, requires an extension of my social skills. I cannot be an effective priest if I cannot talk to people. I cannot be a good priest if I have to run to my

room every five minutes because I am too shy to meet the public. I cannot be a priest if I cannot mingle in a crowd. Do I always like to do it? Perhaps not, but you must learn to do it, often at the expense of great energy and personal cost. This is essential.

When we meet one another in the corridor, there *must* be an acknowledgement of the other person, even if it is only a simple “Good morning” or a nod of the head. If I routinely meet others without greeting them, I cannot function as a priest who is called to be an agent of unity. Simple social interactions, such as carrying on a meaningful table conversation, anticipating the needs of one another at table, looking attentive in class or in presentations, are basic human skills.

If it costs you something to practice these basic human skills, then offer it up. They must be mastered. Nonchalance in simple social engagements leads to others thinking that you simply do not care. Here, we may know how odd you are and give you a pass. In the parish, your lack of proper social engagement will be read as callousness or worse. You never have a second chance to make a first impression. Make the most of it by practicing here.

I will conclude this section with the words of Pope John Paul II:

Human maturity, and in particular affective maturity, requires a clear and strong training in freedom, which expresses itself in convinced and heartfelt obedience to the “truth” of one’s own being, to the “meaning” of one’s own existence, that is to the “sincere gift of self” as the way and fundamental content of the authentic realization of self.

A second quality of the human person that the seminary calls us to perfect is that of generativity. A fully alive human being is not only grounded; he or she is also generative. A great deal of ink has been spilled in recent years concerning the generative aspect of priestly ministry. There can be little doubt that there is a quality of generativity that must be a part of who we are as priests.

In the words of Archbishop Sheen, “‘Increase and multiply’ is a law of sacerdotal life no less than biological life.” (*The Priest is not his Own*, 57) That generativity does not begin in some distant time;

rather, it must begin now. You aspire to be called “father.” What kind of life are you going to offer the community now?

Archbishop Sheen goes on to enumerate several ways in which the priest demonstrates generativity in his life and ministry. One is convert making. Another is fostering vocations. Obviously, convert making touches directly on the quest of the new evangelization. Perhaps it would be a fruitful discussion for a later conference, because I believe we give short change to the task of convert making in the Church today.

In this conference, I would like to focus on fostering vocations. Certainly, we have heard enough of this in our dioceses and religious communities. We know how to speak about vocations. All of us here, I am sure, could offer eloquent testimony to the action of God in our vocational lives, unique as they are. We know how to attract young people to the priesthood and religious life. We know, to some extent, what motivates them.

I would like to take a bit of a different angle on this question, however, and talk about the way in which we foster vocations here in the seminary, among ourselves. How does each of you foster the vocations of his brothers here? How do we all purposefully help sustain the call that has been given to each and that has brought us to this crucial juncture in discerning God’s will in our lives? How do we act as spiritual fathers and nurturers of one another’s vocational journey?

I would say we must first begin by fostering a life in community that is life giving and not desiccating. What is this community of formation about? It is about prayer. It is about study. It is about cultural challenge. It is about service. Vocations can only be fostered here when we are authentic about the nature of the community.

I cannot be generative in fostering vocations if I never challenge the cultural expectations of the larger society. I cannot foster vocations if I denigrate the importance of prayer through my idle talk and bad example. I cannot be generative about vocational life if I never offer any example of service or even meaningful conversation to those who live with me in this community. Let us all ask ourselves

these important questions concerning the generativity of our lives together:

1. Do I frequently ask my brothers to pray with me outside the established times of prayer in the community?
2. Is my table conversation at each meal edifying or do I engage in silly banter for the purpose of amusing others?
3. Is my recreational activity life-giving or do I often succumb to the popular culture?
4. How much time do I spend isolated in my room using the internet or watching television?
5. Am I quick to volunteer my services for house or class projects?
6. Do I do the least I need to do to get by?
7. Do I murmur and criticize the faculty, administration and my fellow students behind their backs?

These are a few questions. There might be many more. Are we asking these kinds of questions? Are we bringing concerns we have about the generative quality of the seminary to the rector or the vice rector? If we aspire to be called “father,” which we do, what kind of father do you want to be? Do you desire to be a father who is honest and open, who gives himself freely to prayer, who is willing to listen? Or do you desire to be a father who is backbiting, deceptive, critical and engages in unmanly gossip and idle talk?

If we focus on the quality of generativity in our priestly formation, which we must, let us resolve to continually be fine tuning our means of attaining this essential quality. Then we are fostering vocations here. Nothing can kill the tender vocation faster than a barbed word or a misplaced criticism.

When looking for some best practices for generativity, I will consider three: Cultural enrichment, an open door policy and listening. First, cultural enrichment. In your time at Saint Meinrad, you will undoubtedly hear two things from the rector. Every rector, after all, has his little catchphrases. The first is the need for a spirit

of *arête* to penetrate the life of the community. *Arête*, in Greek, means habitual excellence.

As seminarians and as priests, we should be striving to express this excellence in everything we do. Excellence means never settling for the mediocre in ourselves or in our communities. It means constantly challenging what is here. It means practically implementing a strategic vision for how things can be better. It means communal conversion in the most concrete sense.

The other expression you will hear from me is “raise your gaze.” The poet T. S. Eliot wrote these words describing the condition of modern culture in *The Wasteland*:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only  
There is shadow under this red rock,  
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),  
And I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Eliot’s point is this. The cultural point of reference of modern humanity is decidedly in the dust, focused on what Blessed John Henry Newman called the fanciful or the popular. Our cultural icons today are earthbound. The music, the literature, the art we engage drag our consciousness into the dust where fear reigns.

We are caught in a quagmire of sexualized, materialized images of what is supposed to be important in life. We have lost sight of the transcendent in an eternal contemplation of ourselves. We cannot think ourselves immune to this contagion here. We are all products of our commercialized culture.

Where do you spend your time? How do you enrich yourself culturally? Are your cultural imaginations buried in the stony

rubbish of our modern prejudices? An example of this is Facebook, Twitter and other social networking tools. Who cares what people are having for lunch? How much time do we spend following the inane daily activities and incidental musings of our hundreds of friends, when our minds and imaginations might be better engaged?

Raising our gaze means looking up from the immediacy of a navel-gazing popular culture and seeing our true citizenship in heaven. As priests, our lives are supposed to point toward the transcendent and the meaningful in the material, not to the material as an end in itself.

Raising our gaze means trying to find cultural expressions that are generative – music, literature, theater and art that are engaging for the long run and not merely satisfying for the length of a reign in the Top 40 or until the final bell is sounded in the wrestling match. Engaging a more generative culture is not snobbish or elitist. It is human. Just because you do not understand something does not mean that it is worthless. It merely means that there is an invitation.

A second generative best practice is the open door policy. The open door is an invitation for others to come in. While it is true that we must at times have some privacy to pray, to focus on study and complete projects, we also need to invite others in. This is perhaps related to the functional extroversion I spoke of earlier. A good practice is to have your door open for about one hour a couple of nights per week.

An open door policy encourages all of us to be more open to hospitality. Needless to say, the hospitality offered need only be our company, but we need to be willing to offer our company without reserve on occasion. It is good practice for becoming the public person that the priest must necessarily be.

An open door policy also encourages another good priestly (and human) value, cleanliness. Brothers, there is little to no excuse for living in a room that is not ready for visits almost at a moment's notice. Dirty or extremely cluttered living spaces indicate two things: one, a lack of personal care and perhaps even good hygiene. Second, a lack of stewardship and care for the property of others. For the most part, of all us will spend the rest of our lives in

borrowed living spaces. Keeping those spaces habitable for the next occupant is an essential formation question.

Connected to the open door policy is the final generative best practice, listening. In a culture inundated with aural clutter, listening is often the most important aspect of what we do as priests. As all of you are aware, one of the first charges I give to our new seminarians is “being here.” Attention is a key aspect of seminary formation.

It is also the first step of obedience. Obedience begins with quality listening and that must be practiced early in our lives of formation. The practice of good listening begins with a willingness to listen, an open ear and an equally open heart. After ordination, many of you will realize that good confessions, good counseling and, often, good teaching depends upon the ability that people have to tell their stories and the willingness of the priest to listen to those stories.

Sometimes that is all they need. Listening is a sign of respect and active listening indicates a real interest in the lives of others. Listening is also the first stage of empathy and compassion. St. Benedict, in the prologue to the holy *Rule*, encourages his disciples not only to listen but to incline the ear of their hearts. Listening opens our hearts to the needs of our brothers here. It makes us worthy to be called brothers to one another. If we aspire to that spiritual fatherhood of which we hear so much, then the first quality of a good father is to pay attention, to carefully listen to those for whom he has spiritual care.

The final quality for human formation that I would like to focus on today is gratitude. Our sense of gratitude for our lives, our vocations, our education, our formation, our friends, indeed for everything, draws its energy and power from one source, Jesus Christ. When I was growing up as a Baptist child in the South, in Sunday School we had a song, “O How I Love Jesus.” The words are not difficult to remember:

O how I love Jesus! O how I love Jesus!  
O how I love Jesus! Because he first loved me!

Our sense of gratitude comes from our acknowledgement of who we are, the enlightenment we have received in a true spirit of humility. We are sons and daughters of God. We are a people picked up by the Good Samaritan, the Lord. We are those who have received, completely without merit and without cost to ourselves, the love of God who cared so much for the world that He gave his only Son to be our savior. As St. Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Romans:

While we were still helpless, Christ died at the appointed time for the ungodly. Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How much more then, since we are now justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath. (Romans 5:6-9)

Gratitude for so great a love spills over for us in the perpetual sacrifice that makes present this divine gift in a neverending way, the Holy Eucharist. *Eucharistia*, thanksgiving, is the source and summit of our lives as Christians. Our appreciation and celebration of the Eucharist tells us how to live. Just as Christ Jesus mandated that we love God and love our neighbors, so our appreciation of the gift of redemption and the gift of the Holy Mass must inform our daily lives.

Brothers and sisters, this is not rocket science. Saying “thank you” is easy if our hearts are truly attuned to what we have received. What are the best practices for gratitude? Simply saying the words, for a start. Writing thank you notes is another important best practice. I do not mean thank you emails. I mean notes sent through the mail or placed in our community mailboxes.

Every year I receive dozens of notes from thoughtful seminarians who want to express their gratitude for what they have received in formation or in a class. This is so important. How could we go through four to six years of formation without ever acknowledging with sincere gratitude what we have received here? I keep every thank you note I receive, because each one is a testament to what



we are doing here: instilling a sense of purposeful thankfulness for the gifts God has given us.

Another best practice is a purposeful meal prayer. When we pray the meal blessing privately, let it not be perfunctory or trite. Let it be heartfelt and meaningful, even if it's only for grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup. Even the base animals offer signs of gratitude for what they have received at the hand of others. Our failure to do so places us on a lower level. Only lives steeped in sin could be as base as that.

Brothers and sisters, today I have presented some values and attitudes for our common life that touch on the qualities of a well developed human person. I began this conference with a brief discussion of the new evangelization as a re-evangelization. When we dare to become better people, we proclaim the Good News to a world often drowning in mediocrity. As we gather insight on the issue, we can do no better than to turn to the insight on St. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians:

He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming. Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

In our pursuit of these lofty goals, we must turn to the aid of the saints, and in particular Our Lady, as we say....

# 4. The Parable of Human Formation, the Parable of Christ - 2008

In the convocation address that began this school year, I remarked on several aspects of formation drawn from the thought of John Henry Newman. Today, I would like to continue these reflections by way of an examination of Newman's understanding of Christology and the way in which Christology informs the task of human formation in a seminary and school of theology. Newman's understanding of the event of Jesus Christ comes by way of his appreciation of the idea of parable, and so, I will begin the reflections today with a short definition of parable.

## **The Character of Parable**

A parable is defined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* as an example (or a type) of proof. The parable is, at its root, a comparison or an exposition of a *relationship* between two terms. One of the defining qualities of a parable is the presence of "multiple meanings [which] lie hidden within the complexities of a narrative, and these challenge or provoke the recipient to interpretation. Parables are lures for interpretation and also revelation of the very process of interpretation itself."<sup>1</sup>

1. J. Dominic Crossan, "Parable," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, et. al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 146-152 V: 146-147. See also: M. Boucher, *The Mysterious Parable*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series (Washington: Catholic University of

Parables create tension by their very nature and, therefore, their interpretation takes on a quality of multivalence, even infinite interpretability. At the heart of parable is a creative tension that is, ultimately, irresolvable. In Newman's estimation, God must be understood like a parable. God is not a subject to be exhausted by human discourse, but an immeasurable invitation. "He, though One, is a sort of world of worlds in Himself, giving birth in our minds to an infinite number of distinct truths, each ineffably more mysterious than any thing that is found in this universe of space and time."<sup>2</sup>

### **The Parable and Incarnation**

The parable is also profoundly associated with Christ for Newman; it is inculcated within the very heart of the Christian mystery. Jesus not only told parables; his very being was a parable. The Incarnation can be understood in Newman as a parabolic encounter in the following way.

Christ is realized (that is, made more real to us) in the context of Christian belief as being God and a human being. This juxtaposition does not seem to lend itself to *intelligent* explanation. Rather it affords the opportunity, not of *knowing* or understanding or comprehending the Incarnation as a fixed horizon upon which to focus or a determined vantage point from which to originate, and thereby reducing it to the formulaic, even the idolatrous, but for entering into a relationship with the limitless horizon of the Incarnate God. The Incarnation reveals the reality that cannot be perceived *at first sight*. Newman states it this way in his Christmas sermon of 1835:

He came in lowliness and want; born amid the tumults of a mixed and busy multitude, cast aside into the outhouse of a crowded inn, laid to His first rest among the brute cattle. He

America, 1977) and R.W. Funk, *Parables and Presence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

2. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 463.

grew up, as if the native of a despised city, and was bred to a humble craft. He bore to live in a world that slighted Him, for He lived in it, in order in due time to die for it. He came as the appointed Priest, to offer sacrifice for those who took no part in the act of worship; He came to offer up for sinners that precious blood which was meritorious by virtue of His Divine Anointing. He died, to rise again the third day, the Sun of Righteousness, fully displaying that splendour which had hitherto been concealed by the morning clouds, and He rose from the lowly manger to the right hand of power,—raising human nature, for Man has redeemed us, Man is set above all creatures, as one with the Creator, Man shall judge man at the last day.<sup>3</sup>

Things are not what they seem to be and this engagement with mystery, realized not as that which cannot be known, but that which is infinitely knowable is, for Newman, orthodoxy. Heresy, on the other hand, is the reckless attempt to alleviate the tension of the parable, to solve the problem or to define the mystery of God.

Falling back heavily (or even lightly) on one of the constitutive terms of the parable, God or Man, compromises our ability to perceive the reality of the Incarnation, which is the precarious yet dynamic and fruitful balancing on the edge of the parabolic knife, the meeting point of the two terms.

#### **Parable and Christian Mystery**

This central insight into the parabolic nature of the reality of the Incarnation fanned out, for Newman, into other areas of discourse within the context of the Christian mystery. The tension that defines Jesus, the God-Man, remains the focal point and the model for other parabolic discourse in the life of the Church.

For example, doctrinal formulations are parabolic because they unveil the generative energy of the Incarnate Word. This parabolic dimension impinges on the heart of the understanding of

### 3. Parochial and Plain Sermons.

inspiration in Scripture. It touches on sacramental theology, the nature of Church life, education and religious life.

In other words, the parabolic tension in the life of the Church reflects the central mystery of the Church, the parable of Jesus. Of course, this model has ramifications for the specialized discourse that engaged Newman for almost 65 years, the discourse of preaching and theology. In this scheme, rather than solving problems and providing definitive answers, preaching and theology must somehow promote the inherent tension found at the dynamic heart of Christianity. The task of the preacher/theologian in this model becomes the encouragement of fertile tension to advance an ever-deepening and profound relationship with the person of Jesus.

It is the encouragement of a lack of completeness and a resistance to all calcifying factors within Christian discourse. It is the insistence on the position that all “answers” are in some way provisional, and growth and change in the individual and in the Church are essential for the preservation of the central mystery. In the *Oxford University Sermons*, Newman proposes of the Christian that: “His Saviour has interpreted for him the faint or broken accents of Nature; and that in them, so interpreted, he has, as if in some old prophecy, at once the evidence and the lasting memorial of the truths of the Gospel.”<sup>4</sup>

#### **Newman and the Poetic Reality of Christ**

Newman’s Christology is predicated on the maintenance of that largeness that is demanded in the parabolic encounter and therefore transcends the scientific, historical question. The parabolic tension inherent in the central principle of Christianity is that of the poem of the all-divine and the all-human.

Scientific and historical questions analyze, dissect and define,

4. John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1868-1881) 32.

whereas poetic discourse is enhancing, inviting and broadening. For Newman, the nature of all religious discourse was ultimately poetic. It invites. Newman even applied this poetic nature to the discourse of theology, particularly the creed.

The creed was ultimately a poem and, in viewing it as poem, it was possible to reimagine the theological discourse of the early Church. To perceive the poetic nature of the God-Man, Newman insisted on a return to the patristic sources of Christology, to the thought of Nicea, St. Athanasius, St. Leo the Great and the Council of Chalcedon.

For Newman, the tensile definition of Chalcedon, describing in parabolic terms the historical reality of Jesus, at once Jesus of Nazareth and the eternal Christ, was the matter of Christianity, its sole point of reference, its teaching, its worship and its life. And, as the destiny of the human person was to fall into the reality of Christ, just as it had fallen into the reality of sin, thus the Incarnate Word defines the nature of the human person.

#### **Human Formation and Conformity to Christ**

Newman's reflections upon the particular nature of the event of the Incarnation give us insight into the nature of human formation. The goal of human formation in the context of a Christian community of faith is clear. It is the goal of St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, "He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him."<sup>5</sup>

The natural development of the person is to be more like Christ, who provides the model of humanity in the context of Christianity. We fail to realize our authentic humanity if we fail to recognize the call of St. Paul in the letter to the Corinthians. We fail to recognize our full potential when we insist upon living into the reality of the Fall of Adam and its attendant ills.

Human formation becomes, then, the foundation of all Christian formation, as Pope John Paul tells us in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. "The

## 5. I Corinthians 6, 17.

whole work of priestly formation would be deprived of its necessary foundation if it lacked a suitable human formation.”<sup>6</sup> “The priest should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to make meeting and dialogue ways to create trust and cooperation, to express serene and objective judgments.”<sup>7</sup>

He can do this because he has conformed his life to the parable of the Incarnation. This theme is not unique in the thought of the late Holy Father. It is rather one that pervades 20th-century theology, the search for the authentic meaning of the human person in an age when false and, indeed, homicidal understandings of freedom and choice permeate the landscape of a culture littered with the debris of death.

We see the traces of this renewed emphasis in anthropology in the work of the theologians of the *Nouvelle Theologies*, its outlines in the writings of Pope Pius XII, and its elucidation in the thought of the Second Vatican Council. Modern man wishes to know himself, and the consistent message of the Church is that this knowledge is possible only through and with Christ.

Furthermore, we realize our complete humanity not only by conformity to the behavior of Jesus – what would Jesus do? – but also through the modality of Jesus. How is Jesus in the world? In what manner does He present himself? What is his dynamic quality?

Newman’s reflections and those of Pope John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* help us to understand the Christological dimension of human formation. I would offer three insights that come from these reflections that may provide an adequate guide to looking at the question of human formation, whether in the setting of a seminary, a parish, a presbyterate or a diocese.

### **Three Christological Insights into the Nature of the Human Person**

6. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 43.

7. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 44.

The first Christological insight into human formation in the thought of Newman follows from Newman's understanding of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Our profession of the Rule of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon unveils a richness to the Christ event that extends beyond the apprehension of the physical person of Jesus of Nazareth. Perception of the Jesus of history is perception of the Christ of faith.

Things are not what they seem to be by way of the senses. Through the senses, Jesus is a Jewish itinerate preacher of a certain time and place with messianic pretensions, the historical Jesus. His execution is a barrier to the full realization of his being. St. Paul elucidates this point with his insight that "we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness."<sup>8</sup>

There is more to the cross, however, than meets the eye. From this Christological insight, we discover the central principle of Christian existence, the presence of a sacramental imagination. The sacramental imagination, by which we discern the reality lurking behind and beyond the physical species, governs the life of faith. We celebrate it daily in the Eucharist.

As priests, we announce it in the Holy Mass: *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccata mundi*. We make this audacious announcement while having the impunity to hold what to the eyes of sight appears to be a mere piece of bread, a cup of common wine. The sacramental imagination proclaims with boldness: things are not what they seem to be. There is more here than meets the eye.

This boldness is drawn from the energy of the simultaneous presence of the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith. As we proclaim this reality with such boldness, we also realize that it extends beyond the action of the altar to the world, indeed to the whole world. The Eucharist, as source and summit, both feeds and gains momentum from the action of the sacramental reality of

## 8. I Corinthians 1, 23.



Christ in the world, indeed in the most mundane aspects of the human condition.

This is the pastoral instinct of the priest. The implementation of the sacramental imagination in daily living, in daily pastoral care, is his license to make the bold pronouncements of the liturgy. The priest looks at the strengths and weaknesses of the flock and proclaims: there is more here than meets the eye.

He gazes upon the troubling and troublesome parishioners and knows: there is more here than meets the eye. He understands that this paradox is the bread and butter of discipleship, his constant challenge, his most ardent desire and his greatest aspiration.

Again, we look at the definition of parable mentioned earlier. One of the defining qualities of a parable is the presence of “multiple meanings [which] lie hidden within the complexities of a narrative, and these challenge or provoke the recipient to interpretation.” Our human formation depends upon our ability to transfer the parabolic insight of Christology into the daily narrative of the Church.

We look upon our fellow human beings in the context of parabolic narrative. We search behind and beyond what is presented by the context of frail humanity and realize that the folly of their crosses, the scandal of their lives, are not their ends any more than the cross, with its fearsome presentation, exhausted the reality of the living God present in the person of Jesus. There are multiple meanings in every life. That is pastoral care.

But, human formation also depends upon our ability to turn the generative power of this insight, that there is more here than meets the eye, upon ourselves. We must not reduce ourselves to our daily failures, our momentary lapses, or the internal scandals that appear, perhaps only to the inner eye of our imagination.

The sacramental imagination is self-perception and sometimes the greatest pastoral care is that which we must offer ourselves. Pope John Paul remarked, “Pastoral study and action direct one

to an inner source, ... an ever-deeper communion with the pastoral charity of Jesus.”<sup>9</sup>

The second Christological insight for human formation drawn from Newman is that tension is the only way to growth. The Incarnation, as the central principle of our faith and our living, is a tensile reality. It tugs at the mind and the heart with contrariety. This tension, central to the orthodox expression of faith, becomes the very engine, the energy of the life of the Church.

One way of understanding this necessary complexity, this tension, is in the realization of emotional maturity. The immature person seeks facility. The immature person is completely self referential. The immature person is simple. The immature person is a kind of Arian, a psychological heretic.

Often, perhaps all too often, this immaturity is expressed among priests as a kind of narcissism. My opinion is the only one that counts. I must have the last word in every conversation. Only my needs need to be met. The inability to see ourselves as part of a larger world, a greater good, is the essence of narcissism.

Some scholars see the prevalence of the narcissistic personality at the core of the Church’s scandals surrounding sexuality. A less dramatic form of narcissism is a kind of clericalism that seeks privilege, entitlement or even profit from the total gift of vocation that God has given to us. We cannot build our egos by way of the gift of vocation.

The narcissistic personality sees the needs of others as intrusions on his or her fulfillment, or more sinisterly, the means of his or her fulfillment. The narcissistic personality cannot find a place in formation because he does not perceive the need for formation. He has all of the answers.

One thing, however, is very clear. The Church has no need for any more narcissistic priests, deacons or lay ministers. There is no room in the Church for the completely self-referential, the guru or

## 9. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 57.

the alternative formator. Why? Because the narcissistic personality thinks he has all of the answers and sees no value in the pursuit of discipleship at all.

Emotional maturity is the ability to see my needs and the needs of the other as complementary. Bound together on a common journey of the discovery of God, the pastor and the parishioner find common hopes, common frustrations and common dreams in the tensile engagement with the God who is beyond all understanding.

Earlier this year, the Holy See issued a document on the use of psychology in the formation of seminarians. That document listed some of the qualities of emotional maturity that seminarians must demonstrate. They bear listing here:

- A positive and stable sense of identity
- A solid sense of belonging
- The freedom to be enthused by great ideas and to realize them
- The courage to make decisions and stay faithful to them
- The capacity to correct oneself
- An appreciation of the beautiful and the true
- Trust
- Integrated sexuality<sup>10</sup>

Emotional maturity implies the ability to continually rethink and reform assumptions, ideas and conceptions, to suspend judgment, to seek beyond the eternal, "I." Emotional maturity is the ability to change one's mind as one grasps the ever deeper, ever broader, ever wider reality of men and women who are images of God, the God that cannot be reduced to the mirror image of my preferences, my opinions, my goals.

This maturity invariably evokes tension in the person, but this

## 10. Guidelines for the Use of Psychology in the Admission and Formation of Candidates for the Priesthood, 2.

tension is the vibrating heartstring of an intense, intimate relationship with the divine and human Christ who invites us into the life of God Himself. As Pope Benedict says: “Fellowship in the Body of Christ means fellowship with one another, mutual acceptance, giving and receiving on both sides.”<sup>11</sup>

The third Christological insight for human formation is the necessity of the development of the poetical sensibility. We live today in a culture defined by utility and popularism. Newman referred to the popular as the “fansical” and defined it as that which engaged the person for a moment, in a defined aspect of the personality, but was not ultimately fulfilling by way of its simplicity.

We might refer to this same reality as popular culture, a life lived in the top forty, the newest fad or the latest celebrity. The utilitarian is defined by Newman as that which is narrowly perceived to fulfill certain needs in the human condition, but only on a provisional basis. We live in a culture that promotes both of these values. Gabriel Marcel defined the two pursuits of the human mind as problem solving and mystery seeking. The problem-solving man seeks solutions; the mystery-seeking man seeks inspiration. Inspiration is neither utilitarian nor popular.

The paradox of modern humanity is that while we live in a culture that presents utility and the popular as ends, we are still possessed of human hearts that long for the expansive horizons of the poetic, even though we no longer have the language to talk about it. This is pastoral leadership’s greatest challenge and its greatest opportunity.

Newman insists that religion is ultimately, to use his expression, poetical. It requires time and devotion to fully begin to appreciate its gifts. It requires a lifetime of engagement that extends beyond the top forty, the up-to-date or the relevant. It realizes that the cult of immediate relevance is the death of God, whose mysteries cannot be fathomed in a thousand “readings,” “hearings” or “sightings.”

## 11. Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith, 69.

Pope Benedict has remarked: "Faith creates culture and is culture ... It tells man who he is and how he should go about being human." When we know this, we have attained true humanity. And so, the priest must necessarily seek the expansion of cultural horizons, finding meaning in the arts, in literature and in other expressions of the human spirit that transcend the utilitarian and popular mentality.

The priest, as pastoral minister, must understand popular culture, but he must not live in popular culture. He must not see the bounds of culture in the ephemeral and the passing. Learning to view art, to listen to music, to experience drama, to read literature and poetry is necessary because it trains the mind, the heart and the spirit toward the transcendent. It gives the priest depth perception, encouraging him to guide his life, not by that which is temporary but that which infinitely engages.

In learning to appreciate art and poetry, the priest learns to look for the art and poetry in the mundane, daily tasks of spiritual and pastoral care. In learning to look at art, he learns to look at the world as potential rather than finality. In learning to read literature, he seeks the imaginative horizons of the page in the nursing home patient, the sick, the dying, the student, the homebound and, indeed, himself.

Again the Holy Father has remarked: "All sacred images are, without exception ... images of the resurrection. History is read in the light of the resurrection and for that very reason they are images of hope, giving us the assurance of the world to come."<sup>12</sup>

The inculcation of the poetic sensibility leads us to prayer. Prayer, likewise, in our cultural understanding can be highly utilitarian. How often does the priest hear: "I am frustrated; my prayer is not working..."? Yet the object of prayer is not utilitarian fulfillment, but an immersion in the depths of the life of God. It is communion

## 12. Images of Hope.

with God. It takes time and does not necessarily yield immediately gratifying results.

Prayer is a commitment to the poetic and parabolic life of God, one that expands over time and draws the person of prayer into the folds of a relationship that cannot be exhausted by first acquaintance. Prayer familiarizes us with the parabolic God and makes us love Him, and in loving Him, loving the other and ultimately (yet paradoxically, firstly) our true selves.

The ability to love, truly love, unveils the mystery of God who is love in the actions of the human heart. We experience this love, this poetry, parable, this prayer most profoundly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, by which we offer true immolation to the lies that plague modern man as surely as the lies of the serpent plagued our ancestors in faith.

As the fragmented pieces of the Host are regathered in the body of the Church, we fulfill the prayer of Christ: that they may be one. We find once more that original unity of self lost in the Fall. We discover once more our profound oneness with God. We become One by becoming more like Christ; we become truly who we are by conforming our life and our mode of being to his. The Eucharist then forms the ultimate parabolic parameters of human formation. It tells us who we are.

These are challenging insights. However, equipped with these insights, we have the raw matter of living a full life, the only kind of full life, a life in union with Christ and in union with the source of our being, the Holy Trinity. With these insights, we have the potential to understand more profoundly the powerful longing that churns within us.

With these insights about Christ, we can see clearly who we are amid the encircling gloom of social maledictions, the swirling fog of a culture of mendacity. With these insights, we know who we are, who we truly are, within the context of the lies that sometimes cloud our senses, both external and internal.

The realization of these insights is, in essence, the parabolic project of our seminaries, our schools of theology, our parishes, our

dioceses, our institutions. We can, in this context, only rely upon the light of God revealed to us in the face of Jesus to continue to enlighten us. Perhaps we can find no better words to formulate our prayer than those of Cardinal Newman himself:

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home—

Lead Thou me on! Keep Thou my feet: I do not ask to see

The distant scene,—

one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou

Shouldst lead me on.

I loved to choose and see my path; but now

Lead Thou me on!

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on,

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone;

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since,

And lost awhile.

The Lord be with you. May Almighty God bless you, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

# 5. The Heroism and Virtues of the Priest - Opening Conference, Fall 2009

Good afternoon and welcome to this new formation year at Saint Meinrad. How could we begin to enumerate the many blessings the Lord has afforded this community of faith in bringing into our midst our new seminarians? The presence of these new men among us is a renewal of our challenge to become increasingly faithful to our vocations, to the supernatural call we have received in Christ Jesus.

We are especially blessed to be called to this vocation in this year that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, has named a Year for Priests. In my conferences this semester, I would like to focus on a topic all too little discussed in the life of the Church today: the heroism of the priest and the virtues of the priest.

Who are my priest heroes? How could I begin to name the men from our great Tradition who have inspired the lives of men and women to become more and greater than themselves in living the life of Christ? The lives of many of these priest-heroes are well known to us.

We might think, for example, of St. Gregory the Great, the man called from his monastic solitude to serve the life of the Church, a man whose *Pastoral Rule* has inspired countless generations of priests to a greater sense of service, a greater capacity for compassion.

Or I might mention St. Francis de Sales, a man who suffered such great trials in his pastoral life, but nevertheless persevered to the point that his pastoral care, his spiritual direction, particularly of members of the lay faithful, was so generously received that he was able to effect a reversal of the tide of obstinacy and increasing demoralization that confronted the Church of France in the 17th



century. St. Francis was a model of humility in his priestly vocation, and by that virtue he changed the world.

I might also mention a contemporary of St. Francis, St. Vincent de Paul. What priest rose from more humble origins to serve, in that same sense of humility, among the great and mighty? He was a man whose life was one of exemplary service to the poor and neglected. He founded religious communities and, in his spare time, reformed seminaries and became a great saint.

Of course, I must mention a great hero of mine, Fr. John Henry Newman, whose heroic life of service as a priest is soon to be acknowledged by the Universal Church in his forthcoming beatification. Cardinal Newman, the greatest mind and intellect of his age, was also a man who served as a parish priest every day among the poor and needy of the industrial city of Birmingham. And, of course, all of the great heroic priests are not men whose lives have become well known.

This past summer, I had the chance to return to my native diocese of Memphis to offer some days of study for the priests. I have to admit that I was a bit intimidated by the prospect of returning to my native place to speak to those men whose ministry and lives so profoundly affected my course in life, my spirituality, my vocation. These priests will never be famous, except in the lives of those whom they have known and served over the years.

So many hero-priests go unnoticed, but their heroism is great and their virtues the same as those saints who have gone before them. In all priests, there is something to admire, some quality of heroism that gives them all a distinctive character, a charism, a camaraderie, even as they are bound on that common journey of humanity and will inevitably be forgotten in the common way of fame and fortune. Among these hero-priests, I mention our newly ordained, those men who left these halls just this year and today do heroic things in distant places and continue to inspire us by their witness.

What makes these priests great? I want to focus my reflections this semester on the virtues of priestly discipleship. I might have chosen any number of ways of expressing the thoughts I would like

to communicate, but placing them in the context of discipleship seems to offer us the opportunity to reflect not only on our particular vocations, but on the way in which our particular vocations enmesh themselves into the great image of discipleship presented in the holy Scriptures, and by the Church in its Tradition.

Searching for images of discipleship in the New Testament, we might turn first to St. Paul. St. Paul gives a nice description of discipleship in the first letter to the Thessalonians (5:17-24). Standing as it does at the head of the New Testament canon, it offers us a keen insight into what Christian discipleship is all about.

Rejoice always.

Pray without ceasing.

In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Do not quench the Spirit.

Do not despise prophetic utterances.

Test everything; retain what is good.

Refrain from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.

In St. Paul's language, all of this seems quite simple, and yet it is vastly complex, so complex that, as the Thessalonians undoubtedly knew, it proved difficult to persevere.

**Rejoice Always** – The disciple of Jesus is to seek the joy in life. A good sense of happiness and a better sense of humor are signs of a healthy Christian. Rejoicing always also indicates a kind of contentment. Contentment is not satiation or a sense of accomplishment, but rather that self-knowledge that comes from the restlessness of the heart that is constantly seeking God. As St. Augustine says: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The authentic Christian then finds joy in the search, in the tension of authentic longing.

Misery and morose engagement with the world have no place in an authentic life of discipleship. The idea that God has called us to this way of life as a penance or an opportunity to suffer is not only perverse, it is heresy. The rejoicing of the Christian is the rejoicing of ever-new discovery about the world, oneself, and our brothers and sisters. It is the joy of living in the triumphs of others and the joy of being able to truly sympathize in the tragedies of others. It is a joy that comes from being a part of something, of feeling alive in Him who is our life.

**Pray Without Ceasing** – The disciple of Jesus engages the Lord in relationship, relationship that is deep, abiding and intimate. In Chapter 21 of John's Gospel, Jesus lays the groundwork for this kind of relationship. Three times he admonishes St. Peter to experience a profound love for him as a precursor, a kind of prerequisite to the feeding and tending of the sheep.

Prayer is this relationship, and prayer without ceasing is prayer of the whole person, body, soul and mind united to God in an endless conversation. Prayer as good conversation is not only pouring out our hearts to the object of our love, but attuning our ears to hear the voice of One who has infinitely more to say to us than we have to say to Him.

**Give Thanks** – The call to give thanks is literally a call to make the Eucharist. Eucharist is thanksgiving. Of course, we know, in the central and focused way what it means to make the Eucharist, but the reality of the great Sacrifice is highlighted and indeed enriched by the smaller instances of thanksgiving we have the opportunity to express each day. When St. Paul admonished us to give thanks, it is in every way.

We must be grateful to God for all things, great and small, that He bestows on us each day. To give thanks in all things is to move away from any sense of entitlement, which is the demon that destroys hearts. Nothing that we have comes to us by way of our earning it; we are not entitled to anything, but rejoice at all times in the wonders God has given us, in the gift of this community of faith,

the lives we lead, even the trials we must endure, all providentially arrayed for us as blessings, opportunities and hope.

**Do Not Quench the Spirit** – Here St. Paul offers us an invitation: “Be open to what happens.” With Christ, we can always be sure that we can expect the unexpected. Be open to the unexpected encounter with Christ. Needless to say, in this community of formation, each of us daily encounters something that challenges us in great or small ways.

Be open to the invitation of God, in our dealings with one another, in what we experience in the classroom, in ministry, in our formation both formal and informal. Openness leaves room for the Spirit, whereas closed-mindedness defeats us with a kind of self-regard, a spiritual narcissism that eats at the core of God’s invitation to be his and his alone.

**Do Not Despise Sound Teaching** – Here St. Paul asks us, compels us, to listen to the voice of the Church. Our lives here are only given meaning and structure insofar as we conform to the teachings of the Church and become a part of its great teaching. Listen, learn and understand. Likewise, it is an invitation to not presume we know everything because we know something.

The great Tradition of the Church is a matrix of doctrine, culture and practices that mutually complement and strengthen one another. The Church is our best teacher, our only teacher. In this, likewise, we have the voices of our bishops, both as individual exemplars of the prophetic office of Christ and as a body of apostolic witness and authority. Listen to the voice of the Church; know its Tradition.

**Test Everything** – Engage, read, constantly be growing in your faith. One of our first duties as people of faith and as priests is to know the culture to which we announce Good News. We must be men in the world, men called to service the world, men called to transform the world, without being men who are reduced to the sometimes-lax cultural norms and mores we encounter. As priests, we need to know what is out there, but lives lived totally for popular

culture are ruined lives. Lives lived in the Spirit engage the culture in ways that evangelize.

**Refrain from Sin** – Live a virtuous life, believe what you read, teach what you believe, practice what you teach. It is difficult, but it can be done.

All of these are wonderful admonitions, but I think the most telling line for us is the last one: **The one who calls you is faithful, and he will also accomplish it.** Perhaps that is a message we need to continually be hearing. God does not give us a vocation, be it the general vocation of Christian discipleship or the particular vocations of priesthood, religious life, marriage, consecrated virginity, etc., that He does not give us the grace to live.

This is a truth, a reality upon which we must continually dwell. “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Corinthians 12:9). God in his very being is He who cannot abandon, cannot forsake, cannot leave us orphans (John 14:18). Thus He is the apotheosis of love that never ends, that is never quenched, that is never self-serving (1 Corinthians 13:4, ff).

Discipleship is complex and has many forms. Priestly discipleship, while the same *in principle*, is different from the discipleship of the married couple or the vowed religious or the single man or woman. There are different emphases, charisms, applications. While all are striving toward the same goal, that is, being made holy and whole in spirit, soul and body, different testings and retentions are required.

The life of the priest is defined ultimately by his priestly character, the charism received as a grace at ordination. The soundings of the discipleship of the priest are, however, experienced early, even before the formation experience of the seminary. They are experienced in the very heart of the vocation, in the desire to be a priest, in the character of the man, called by the Church and its members. In his character is recognized the embryonic priesthood. Realizing the priestly character and priestly discipleship in formation, therefore, calls forth a need for a different focus.

Our task here is to focus the discipleship of those who come under our care into a priestly discipleship. We are called, therefore,

to four major realities. First, we are called to be a house of prayer in which we form men of communion. Second, we are called to be a house of study in which we are called to become men of the Church.

Third, this place must be a house of service in which we become more fully men of charity. Finally, this is a house of Christian living, in which the characters of those who pray and study and serve here are formed. Today, I will elaborate on these themes, hopefully setting a tone for the work we will do in this coming year.

### **House of Prayer – Men of Communion**

First, this is a house of prayer. Prayer is the crucible of our lives, the anvil on which is formed that weightless chain that binds us to God and one another. The seminary cannot exist without prayer. It has no reason to exist.

As a house of prayer, the chapel of this seminary is its heart, the tabernacle the very sinews of its beating center. Every day we pour out in prayer the expectations, petitions, intercessions, hopes, pleadings of our souls, seeking to find that point of connection to the heart of Jesus.

The open heart of Jesus, given to us by God in prayer, is a sign to us that God holds nothing back when we are honest with Him, when we truly seek communion with him. He shares with us in prayer the most intimate part of himself, his very life. Prayer is the cherished vulnerability of *cor and cor loquitor*, heart speaking to heart, complete openness to God. And that openness of heart in prayer is our salvation.

In prayer, his heart is open so that our hearts, rent by the disaster of our sin, our selfishness, the pride of generations, the iniquity of Adam, the indignity of the Law, broken promises, shattered community and lost faith, might be opened and renewed.

In prayer, his heart is open, for healing and proclaiming, announcing that we are more than what we seem, that we are a people worth fighting for, worth dying for, a beautiful people who have forgotten their own dignity and worth.

In prayer, his heart is open so that the reality of the human condition, a conflicted condition, might be healed of pride, of ego,

of petty wants and desires. We are saved by his heart, by his life, as St. Peter tells us: “By his wounds, we have been healed” (I Peter 2:24).

In prayer, his heart is open, and from that heart pours out blood and water, his precious blood for the life of the world, the waters of the new Eden, the spring of life, the flood of baptism flowing out from the Jordan and cleansing a sin-ravaged landscape, giving life to the deserts of our hearts.

In prayer, his heart is open so we might see laid bare for us the pure grace, the pure folly of the cross, the pure joy of giving up, and taste the glory of the resurrection. St. Paul tells us: “The love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

In prayer, His heart is open to teach us that we are a vulnerable people – wounded by our past, our lost loves, our broken dreams, our shattered childhoods; made vulnerable by violence, by abuse, by hurts and real pains, by isolation, bigotry, prejudice, shattered hearts and shattered lives.

But his heart is open to announce flagrantly to the world that, although we are a vulnerable people in a vulnerable world, a world wounded by the ravages of hunger, of war, of a culture of death, wounded by indifference, his heart is open and we have hope. His open heart teaches us to hope that we can be better than we are, that we can make a better world.

In prayer, we discover that we are a vulnerable community, vulnerable to pains that are long in healing, by old rejections, perceived slights, generational confusions, the indignities of disability, a lack of respect for the wisdom of age, impatience, judgmental-ness, self-love, but his heart is open to grace and reconciliation. In prayer, the heart of Jesus teaches us to love, to work wonders, to make miracles, to be disciples.

So we must pray, then, that through his heart our hearts may be open, that we might love, that we might see in his wounded body the healing for our wounds, that we might see in his heart precisely who we are – the Body of Christ. Again, St. Paul tells us: “God proves

his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

And by that love alive in the Church, we come to know Him. In prayer, fervent prayer, we discover that there is no Church if our hearts are not joined to the heart of Jesus daily, hourly, momentarily.

In prayer, authentic prayer, we discover that there is no me except that I am in Christ, who first suffered and died and rose for me and loved me, open-hearted, without condition. Thus, in prayer, we become men of communion, united with Christ and joined to one another by that weightless chain of fellowship.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict remarks: “Communion means that the seemingly uncrossable frontier of the I is left wide open and can be so because Jesus has first allowed himself to be opened completely, has taken us all into himself and has put himself totally into our hands.” (*Called to Communion*, 37)

In prayer, we become men of communion whose lives are mysteriously bound up with the sufferings and struggles, the triumphs and joys of all humanity, expressed in the great prayer of unity, the Eucharist, and the great prayer of the Church, the Liturgy of the Hours.

Men of communion who struggle for integrity and authenticity and the courage to appear vulnerable to God and one another. Men of communion who live without compromise the Eucharistic reality of our Lord’s paschal mystery in the heart of the Church.

Men of communion who love their brothers and sisters with as unfeigned and unreserved love as God, who so loved the world that He gave us his Son to be our communion, our promise, our hope.

Here in this house of prayer, we are called to be men of communion.

### **House of Study – Men of the Church**

Second, this is a house of study in which we are formed to be men of the Church. Just as this seminary and school of theology must be a house of prayer, it is also a house of study. Our status, the status of parishes, the status of all Catholic institutions as a house of study highlights the intellectual aspect of the priestly vocation.



The priest has a sacred call to intellectual engagement with the life of the Church. Often, this call can be at odds with the more utilitarian approach to education that can be a feature of our approach to the life of the mind, particularly in our U.S. culture.

The theological has given way to a false sense of the pastoral. Some priests today may not fully appreciate the urgency of quality theological education. They may deem it sufficient to be kindhearted and holy men. While there is no gainsaying the necessity of kindheartedness and holiness in priestly life, the priest must first know something and that knowledge must then be transcribed into a pastoral context.

Theology must remain theological *and* pastoral, and all pastoral effort must be seen as undergirded and reinforced by a solid theological context. Thus, intellectual effort does not stand alone; rather, the priest lives in conjunction with the Church, its authentic tradition, its rich history, its spiritual practices and its cultural expressions.

Likewise, theological knowledge divorced from a living Church is less than useless; it is diabolical. All study flows back into evangelization and is evangelization's surest guide. All study flows back to the living reality of the parish, its daily struggles and its joys.

Authentic theological reflection highlights what is happening in the larger Church, indeed, in the world at large. It gives substance to the pastoral realities faced by the priest each day. The ability to reflect theologically is directly correlative to the priest's understanding of the theological teachings of the Church.

Thus, the life of the priest must be, at some level, the life of the intellectual. Likewise, the virtues and practices of the intellectual life must be firmly in place in priestly formation. Fr. Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges outlines these nicely in his important work, *The Intellectual Life*.

The first is the spirit of prayer. All study, whether in the seminary or in the life of the parish, must be in this context. All theology is theology on the knees. Second, the discipline of the mind must be inculcated through engagement. How are our minds engaged? The

ability to read, to concentrate and to study are not always natural faculties. They can be developed through practice.

Likewise, the discipline of the mind is threatened by too strong an attachment to Internet, television and popular entertainment. The discipline of the mind can never be realized in activities designed for diversion. An inculcation of mind in the ephemeral and the fanciful can never raise us to a contemplation of the Divine, but will keep our minds grounded in mendacity.

Finally, the discipline of the body is essential, the overcoming of sloth, the development of one's attention span and focus. In our contemporary culture, these, again, are not always natural faculties, but they can be developed in practice. Thus, the success of the intellectual life in the priest, while certainly united with the native intelligence of the priest, is also (perhaps largely) dependent upon an act of the will.

Once the will of the priest has been engaged, certain practices for organizing one's life enhance this intellectual prospect. One of these is simplification, the need to avoid distraction. One cannot give full credence and attention to the life of the mind if one is perpetually engaged with the mundane and the superficial. Solitude, to an extent, is also necessary. This implies a comfort with one's self and an adeptness at engaging the imagination.

For such an engagement to be productive, authentic fueling of the imagination must be a priority. One cannot expect to preach well if one never engages the exegetical tradition of the Church. Likewise, one cannot preach well without a thoroughgoing knowledge of and comfort with the great literary traditions upon which we draw our rhetorical and narrative models.

The spirit of intellectual work implies ardor in its pursuit. The quality of ardor only germinates in the full conviction of the value of the work at hand. Once ardor has been established, then concentration, setting aside time and prioritizing study become the requisites for full engagement of the life of the mind.

In all of this, one must keep one's mind upon the goal, the engendering of awe, of mystery, and of the conviction of the

grandeur of the Church and its Tradition. Thus, in a house of study, we become men of the Church.

Men of the Church whose lives have been deeply enriched by the study of the Scriptures and whose knowledge of doctrine is unparalleled and who know how this teaching is meaningful in the lives of the men and women they serve.

Men of the Church who pray with the saints as intimate companions, whose time is spent in holy endeavors, whose love is channeled into the creative use of the Church's spiritual memory.

Men of the Church who love the Church, whose lives are poured out in service to the Church, who do not see the Church as a threatening institution, but as a family whose care and guidance is for the Body of Christ and of which they feel privileged to be a part.

This is a house of study for men of the Church.

### **House of Service – Men of Charity**

Third, this is a house of service and we are men of charity, love. Jesus said to his disciples, "I have come among you, not to be served but to serve and offer my life." Can we, with conviction, speak these words with our Lord? The instinct of the seminarian must be honed to service, unstinting, unrelenting and unqualified.

While care for self is an undoubted necessity for the realization of authentic priestly ministry, an authentic giving of self after the person of Christ is essential. On the Mount of Olives, Jesus offers himself to the Father with these words: "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22: 42). What greater example can be given than that of our Lord, who poured out his blood, his life, his very essence for the building up of mankind?

This kind of love, from which service proceeds, can be realized only in true sympathy with the needs of those around us. A house of service and the inculcation of men of charity begin when we look to our neighbor, proximate and distant, and see the authentic need, the true suffering of that neighbor.

How can we not be witnesses to the suffering of those around us, those who are tried by the economic difficulties of these times, those who are burdened by broken covenants of marriage and

familial betrayals, those who suffer true want and yearn for dignity and bread, those whose lives are tormented by addictions? These hurting brothers and sisters are not far away; they are among us, here in this community. We meet them on the level ground of sympathy only when we can discard the inherent narcissism of our fallen natures.

Look to the other; see in your brothers here the remnant of pale and broken humanity and learn the tenderness of the Savior, the resoluteness of the will of our Lord to attend to them. Place your brothers' needs before your own and service will follow. If you long to do quality ministry, do it here and the service to the masses will follow.

Pope Benedict, in his most recent encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, warns us, however, that "Without Truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell to be filled in an arbitrary way" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 3). This Truth of which the Holy Father speaks is the Truth of the dignity of the human person, an uncompromisable dignity, which is daily under attack by a culture of relativity. The pope goes on to say that "adherence to the values of Christianity is not merely useful, but essential for building a good society and for true integral human development" (*Ibid.*, 7).

Attend to the needs of those around you and remember that in the very least of these, for example, the seminarian for whom you do not care, you entertain Christ. Welcome all who come to this place as Christ, as our Holy Father St. Benedict admonishes us in the holy *Rule*. Thousands of guests and pilgrims come to this Hill every year. Can we learn to see in them the face of Christ, rather than the visage of nuisance? Can we become like our holy patron, St. Meinrad? Can we become martyrs of hospitality?

Cardinal Newman once remarked that "Faith is an active principle," and so it is. We can be holy, we can be learned, we can be men of incredible, even indelible, faith, but if we cannot learn to love, then we are lost. There is no theological principle worth defending where charity breaks down.

If I hate my brother for his ideas, then I have already degenerated

into the heresy of Christian lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness (I John 3:4). That lawlessness looks like contempt for the other and, thereby, contempt for God. Therefore, we must be open to giving rather than receiving. And this service is only meaningful in the context of love.

It is the love of Christ, his Body, his Church, all made real in the very messy context of our brothers and sisters, and it is this love that compels us. The love of Christ invites, yes, but it also compels. Faith that is authentic and real does not allow for compromise in the desire to serve, being men of charity. Faith that is real and true admits no hybridization with self-interest, self service or self-centeredness.

Faith as an active principle means being like Our Lady, who experienced the instillation of the Word in the very marrow of her being, as announced by the angel Gabriel, and rose up and went to serve her cousin, Elizabeth, who was in need. Faith that is true gets up; it moves. It does not flounder in a sense of rank entitlement to privilege and title.

The lowest form of clericalism is that which is waited upon by the Body of Christ. The highest form of clericalism is that which understands that the call we have received is a call to serve others, to the point of death. Give and you will never lose sight of your true calling as men of prayer, men of study, men of service.

Withhold and the specter of the Gospel's dire warning, that when you did not receive these least ones, you did not receive me, threatens with its sinister outcome (Matthew 25:45). Our prayer and our study must overflow in service or we risk losing everything in the hopes of gaining a passing reward that can never satisfy. Thus, we become men of charity.

Men of charity who never count the cost, whose abacation always tends toward the surplus of the eternal "yes."

Men of charity who find in the other the goodness and virtue that may be truly hidden under the cloak of uncertainty, self deceit, self-loathing.

Men of charity who know and practice the art of loving fraternal correction, refusing to countenance anything but the Truth and

understand that the Truth alone will set them and their neighbors free (John 8:32). This Truth is the love of Jesus Christ.

### **House of Christian Living – Men of Character**

Finally, this is a house of Christian living and we are called to be men of character. Our late Holy Father Pope John Paul II observed in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* that human formation is the great structure upon which the other areas of formation depend. To be a man of study, a man of prayer, a man of service, these pursuits find their origin and goal in the name Christian.

Last year, the Holy See promulgated a document on the use of psychology in seminaries. This document is very helpful in that it give us credible insight into the qualities of maturity, particularly affective maturity, that the candidate for orders must demonstrate. It forms a kind of manifesto on Christian character. What are those qualities?

First is a positive and stable sense of one's sexual identity. The ability to form relationships in a mature way is the core of priestly character. Hesitancy and uncertainty in this most basic quality of human personality will only result in feeble and half-hearted engagement with others.

Dealing with these core issues in the context of formation is not optional; it is a necessity and the resources are made readily available in this house of Christian living to form men of stable sexual and relational character. When one's own sexuality is not well comprehended, it leads to perversion of the communal life and covert expressions of sexual energy that undermine the chaste character of a house of Christian living.

Inappropriate expressions of sexuality, immature sexuality in the form of crude comments and attempts at humor, the use of pornographic materials, verbal or behavioral overtures, or the frequenting of establishments incompatible with chaste living are not negotiable. Those who engage in these behaviors will be called to deal with them in the strongest possible terms in the external forum. There is no compromise in this basic element of human formation.

Second is a solid sense of belonging, of being a part of this community and, in the future, a part of a presbyterate. The ability to work well with others is crucial, for the priest must see himself within the context of a matrix of ministers, first in his relationship with his ordinary, then with his brother priests, and then with deacons, lay ministers and volunteers. There is no room for lone rangers in this seminary or in the priesthood.

The example we have is the fellowship of the apostles, flawed men but essential to the ecclesial Body. Here you will be challenged to be a part of this community. It is a requirement. Failure to fully engage this community of faith is a contraindication of vocation.

Third, we must have the freedom to be enthused by great ideas. We must be alive in those intellectual virtues mentioned above and find them life-giving. Open your minds, discuss real issues, learn to be men of healthy debate. Respect the ideas and opinions of others.

Fourth, we must be able to trust one another. Trust is at the core of obedience, because at its heart is an esteem for and acceptance of the other person. Trust, in the most basic sense, can be nurtured only in prayer. Pray together, not only in the required activities of the seminary, but in small groups. Invite your brothers to prayer and in prayer you will build trust. Share your faith, your vocation stories, with one another and you will learn respect.

Fifth, our eyes and hearts must be attuned to an appreciation of beauty in all its forms, in art, in the “splendor of truth” in the authentic moral life and in the human person. True beauty is often looking beyond the surface and appreciating the depth of being.

Sixth is the capacity to correct oneself, which is built on an authentic understanding of oneself. I must know who I am, what are my gifts and talents, what are my areas of growth and conversion. True knowledge of self is not the morbid and scrupulous reflection on sin alone, but the complete understanding of my human being made in the image and likeness of a loving Father.

Seven, you must have the courage to make decisions and stay faithful to them. Many vocations become entrapped in an unhealthy

sense of discernment. No one wants a priest who cannot make a decision and stand by it. This is true in the parochial setting of ministry and it is true in the inner recesses of the priest's life.

This is a place where these qualities of maturity must be nurtured. We will be challenged in this area, even daily. The life of the seminarian and the life of the priest are not so much a studied discipline as an art form. Flannery O'Connor, in her penetrating writings on the practice of literature, speaks of authentic living as the habit of art.

Authentic Christian living is building the character of the person through the creative engagement of the world and not from a slovenly reaction to the situations in which one finds oneself. Christian living as a habit of art is to go beyond the flotsam and jetsam of the surface of life and penetrate the oceanic depths of Christian living. The character of Christian life is the ability to creatively see behind and beyond what is there and to realize what is possible.

This is our life. This is our way of engaging the world. This is our way of participating in the divine reality that confronts us daily with the urgency of invitation. That invitation is to live more deeply, more broadly, more profoundly and to call others to profundity of life. When we have plumbed the depths of that profundity, when we live there, then we are truly instruments in the hand of God for the life of the world. We become men of Christian character.

Men of character who are firm and bold in the battle and who give fight to the qualities of indecision and tentativeness that come from the Evil One.

Men of character who know who they are, what motivates them and what they want. They see their goal as Christ and Christ alone, and nothing can deter them from the pursuit of Him who first pursued them.

Men of character who have broken hearts and willing minds to comprehend the things of God in mystery and manners, fully engaged in the habit and art of being.

I have spoken at length today about priesthood and the formation



for priesthood. The principles of discipleship, however, and the ways in which we make ever more vivid the concreteness of the life of God, are not limited to priesthood, but we who have received the call to this exalted responsibility must be icons of its possibility and its ultimate invincibility.

This place is a house of prayer for the faculty, the staff, those who come here for retreats and programs, because we make it so, because we are true to our call – not only to discern the specific vocation to priesthood, but the primordial vocation of that reality which the citizens of Antioch bore in being called Christians for the first time.

Saint Meinrad is a resource of the Church, not only in its programming and in its product, but in its iconic realization of the possibility of Christian living, of being community, of making Eucharist real in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and in its effects. Saint Meinrad is a sign of charity for those who come within the sheltering arms of this place for an hour, or a day or a lifetime.

It is a sign of hospitality, a beacon of welcome, a signal of hope. Finally, it is a place where we are formed, not where you are formed, but where we are formed and spend our lives forming each other, the faculty and staff forming you, you forming one another.

We do this under the protection of our holy patron, St. Meinrad, and all the saints and with the aid of Our Blessed Lady, the seat of wisdom whom we invoke as we say: Hail Holy Queen ...

# 6. The Dignity of the Priesthood - Opening Conference, Fall 2011

Brothers and sisters, welcome to a new formation year. This year we begin on a somber note. As we know, last Sunday, in the very early hours of the morning, our two brothers, Fr. Jorge Gomez and Stanley Kariuki, were killed in an accident in Tulsa. They were returning from a Knights of Columbus Mass and dinner when their car was struck sidelong by a driver running a red light. They died at the scene.

I am sure that neither of them imagined that that drive would be their last journey on this earth. I am sure that as they drove along they spoke of what would happen that Sunday morning in the parish where they were both assigned. I am sure that their conversations were filled with plans and expectations. I am sure that they spoke of Stanley's return to Saint Meinrad this weekend. I am sure that they never anticipated death.

I am equally sure that they were prepared to meet their ends. They were prepared to do so because they believe in Christ; they had given their lives already to the mystery of his dying and rising. They had promised themselves to eternity. For us, their violent encounter with the paschal mystery renews our conviction that, in the midst of life, death is always lurking.

Undoubtedly, there is sadness for us as we begin this year. We will miss Stanley's presence among us. He was a sweet, mild mannered man. We will miss Jorge and we mourn the promise of service unfulfilled. I can never forget the enthusiasm of his hometown on the day of his ordination.

It would be easy to assign their untimely deaths to the providence of God. I think that is too easy for what we are feeling. I do not

know why these two vibrant, enthusiastic young men died. I know I will miss them. I also know that in the shadow of loss comes the bright promise of the future. Today our new students, our returning students, our faculty and staff come together in the life of this community. We come full of hope, energy and desire to serve Christ in his Church.

We are the resurrection to our own cross. We come at a time of loss, but our only hope is for gain. In these coming days, we have the opportunity to present to one another the authentic nature of the dying and rising of Christ, a dying and rising we are now experiencing in the very fiber of our being.

When our late Holy Father, Blessed John Paul II, called for a “new evangelization” and when our present Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, renewed that call, I believe first and foremost they are asking for a re-evangelization of the Church, a renewal at the heart of the Church that will announce the Good News in fresh ways, internally, making the holy Church a more effective instrument in carrying that same Good News to the ends of the earth, as mandated by the evangelical charge of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

How do we announce a new evangelization for a seminary, a community already steeped in a climate of the quickening of discipleship and filled, hopefully, with those already fully committed to the challenging, yet eternally rewarding, work of announcing the presence of the Kingdom? Perhaps it can only be accomplished by going back to the basics.

In my rector’s conferences this year, I would like to focus on the gift of vocation. All of us have received a call from God. For some of us, that call has been tested and tried by years of prayer and engagement with the Body of Christ. For some, that call is still in the process of being formed. For others, it may be experienced as yet as a faint and ephemeral attitude of faith. However we experience the call of God in our lives, that call is a gift, one that is instilled in us by an act of divine grace, divine mercy.

I would like to begin my reflection today by asking a simple question: Why are you here? I ask that question of all of us, and to

each of us in a particular way. I ask it of our seminarians, both our new men and those who have returned this year to continue the journey of formation to which they have been called and to which they have already given so much. Men, why are you here?

I ask it of our faculty and staff, you men and women who have devoted your careers and your lives for the formation of priests, lay ministers and deacons for the life of the Church. Faculty and staff, why are you here? Why are we here in this new formation year to engage the process of priestly formation, that leviathan struggle that at times buoys us up like the hull of a great ship riding the titanic waves of personal and communal triumph and at times weighs upon us with the fearsomeness of the unfathomable depths of that same abyss?

Why are we here when it seems that every time we pick up a newspaper or access our usual website for news of the world, the priesthood is under attack? What do we hear? The Church, now throughout the world, continues to be embroiled in sexual scandals among its priests. Stories of abuse, many of them decades old, continue to emerge from the shadows of memory and shame, continue to haunt both victims and perpetrators.

We read likewise of the covering-up of these crimes, the what seems like complete disregard for the pain of those who have suffered so wantonly at the hands of those very men who should have protected their innocence from the violent maw of the wolf. I continue to be shocked. I think we all must continue to be shocked that, after two decades of legislation both within and outside the Church, these scandals continue to emerge.

I continue to be shocked. I think we all must continue to be shocked at the toll these scandals take. The toll is the very credibility of the holy Church. The price is a lack of confidence in its leaders. The cost is a net of wide suspicion cast across the path of the innocent.

And there is more. We regularly encounter other kinds of scandalous behavior, the misuse of funds, the abuse of power, the heavy-handed leadership that robs our holy Church of its

trustworthiness as an expression of the love of God in the world. There are those who claim that the priesthood has been robbed of its dignity, and I have more than a little confidence that these claims, at least at some level, are true.

What is the dignity of the priest? What should it be? What is the character of the priest? What is the priest as an agent? These questions are complex and not often asked in our Church and in the world today. For some, they are questions whose answers are already laden with what is called clericalism, because they point to a uniqueness in the priesthood.

Questions about the nature of the priesthood point to the priest as one set apart, both ontologically and literally, for a service that cannot be gainsaid because it is the service of God. First, the priest is a unique character. Part of the difficulty we face in the holy priesthood today is a lack of perception of this uniqueness. In a highly democratized culture, uniqueness in any form is ironically undervalued.

Our social and political conditioning continues to remind us of that axiomatic “truth” that all men are created equal. While that is true at one level, it is also dangerous to hold that we should never expect in our cultural milieu anything encouraging genius, artistic achievement and, in the long run, real leadership.

Often in our cultural environment, we receive mixed messages. We are told simultaneously that we can achieve whatever we set our minds to, but to not aim above the commonplace. Thus we have created a cultureless culture, a bland suburban intellectual landscape in which all expressions of higher thought and transcendental values are seen as elitist and un-democratic.

It was in this vein that Plato insisted that democracy lived in the extreme is next to anarchy. These are lofty reflections. Let us bring the case a little closer to home. In our daily lives, how do we encourage young people who find themselves a bit “different” from the pack? How do we highlight (or denigrate) true talent when we encounter it?

The origins of our cultural perspective in this country are a

thoroughgoing empiricism, an earthboundness, a utilitarianism in which heart and mind are not encouraged to soar, but to produce and be useful in a very narrow sense. And yet such downward gazing is against our nature. Within each of us is that spark of divinity that seeks the stars, that longs for something beyond the practical, that yearns for truth, beauty and goodness expressed in a kind of divine superfluity.

We long for heaven, but the heavy yoke of social and cultural expectation keeps our eyes firmly focused in the dirt of the gutter. Jesus Christ encourages us to exchange that yoke for his own, a yoke that is easy, a burden that is light. The yoke of discipleship allows us to look upward to the stars. It engages us to transcend the fixed root of where we are and dream. It restores our human dignity destroyed by the sin of Adam.

What did the Lord prescribe for Adam in the event of the fall? Until the advent of the Messiah, his lot was to be labor, toil, drudgery and exile from the vision of the empyrean heights. With Christ, there is now hope for a greater dignity in the human condition and yet we continue to saddle ourselves with the adamant burden of our first parents, our lax father and mother who had themselves been freed from the burden set in motion through their disobedience.

Where do we stand in Christ? In Christ we are free. As St. Paul reminds us in the letter to the Galatians: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). In the light of such a promise, how is it that humanity can continue to reject the message of the Gospel and return to its imprisoned condition in the earth like a dog to its own vomit? Christ has made us free and, if by any act of will we continue to wear the yoke of slavery, then we have damaged the dignity wrought for us in the saving act of the cross.

We have an inherent dignity in Christ. Now we must realize it. All of us are set apart in Christ, for God. Now we must manifest it. If all are set apart, there is a new democracy. Now we must make it real. If we are to make it real, we must be led into this new promised land. And who is the Joshua who can take a desert bedraggled people into

that Christian freedom flowing with milk and honey? It must be the priest, the Joshua, the other Jesus.

Christ has prepared for us an un hoped-for dignity and He has called priests to serve his people. Thus the priest is set apart by his character as a baptized person, and by his call to lead and inspire others. He has been given a particular gift to enrich the world. He has not been given that gift to enrich himself or to create for himself a position in opposition to those from whom he has been called.

What does the priest do? What can he do? The priest is called to service leadership and cultic leadership: service leadership for the sake of cultic leadership. The priest leads by confecting the Eucharist in the exercise of his unique power. The priest makes the Church in the confecting of the Eucharist.

What is the Eucharist? It is a covenant, the presence of Christ on earth in a mystical extension of the earth-shattering event of the Incarnation. It is the *Christus prolongatus*, the prolonged event of Christ. The presence of Christ, the continual presence of Christ, ensures that the dignity spoken of above is maintained in the world. The Eucharist makes the Church and thus is the full manifestation of the new condition of humanity.

The Eucharist is the source of human success in its striving to touch the transcendent, to grasp the things of heaven in a way the Icarian pretense of human pride could not. If the priest is set apart in Holy Orders from all the others who have been set apart in Baptism, his status is for service in the cultic action of the constitutive Eucharist. Like Joshua, the priest fights against the citadels of the compromised expectations of our condition and opens the gates of grace, not for his own sense of victory, but to feed a hungry people left to wander the desert.

The priest has a dignity that is manifested in his willingness to fight for the people, even as Joshua railed against the walls of Jericho, even as Christ fought all the way to Calvary. The priest has a dignity that is bound up with the fate of the people. The priest has a dignity that is directed always over the shoulder to encourage a people moving forward, freed from the burdens of the earth. The

priest has a dignity that is not his own, a dignity that rightly belongs to Christ.

The priest has a dignity that is always emptying itself like the breast blood of the pelican to give life to others. The priest has a dignity rooted in sacrifice. The priest has a dignity that bridges the fully human and the fully divine. The priest has a dignity that carries the people on his shoulders so that they can have a better look of that rich valley, that promised land that God has called us to in calling us his sons and daughters, brothers and sisters in our dear Lord, Jesus Christ.

The priest has a dignity that serves as a living icon of that dignity to which we are all called. The priest has a dignity that is not his own. The priest is not his own. The priest is for God and the priest is for us.

When we examine the condition of the holy priesthood today, we must say that in its character, in its essence, there is no compromise to the priesthood. The priesthood today is what Christ realized it to be in the institution of the sacrament of Holy Orders on the night he was betrayed. The priesthood, in essence, is what it is and its inherent dignity is complete and inviolate.

The perception of the dignity of the priest is another story. The essence of the priesthood is safeguarded by the matter and form of the sacrament and the assurances of apostolic succession. The perception of that dignity, however, is undoubtedly compromised. What, or perhaps who, has compromised the perception of the dignity of the priesthood?

It is true that this perception has been assailed in the pretensions of an overweening media-saturated culture. But let us not place the blame completely out there. The loss of respect experienced by the priesthood is not only the product of persecution; it is the product of our own folly.

What compromises the dignity of the priesthood? First, I would say a lack of personal character on the part of priests. All of us are the products of our environment. Many of us have been raised in a highly commercialized culture in which we were told that we



can have everything. We cannot. The character of the priest is dependent upon his ability to understand his nature, his function and his place in the social order.

The character of the priest is compromised when he tries to have his cake and eat it too. It is compromised when he remains with one foot in the world of the so-called “secular” and another in the sacred. It is compromised when it fails to reach its true potential in Christ because the priest is engaged in other activities, which begin to take precedence over his life of prayer and service.

The character of the priest is compromised when he fails to accept completely who he is, when he tries to hold on to that which is not priesthood. It is compromised when he tries to live an ontological lie, when he brackets in any way his essence for the convenience or pleasures inherent in not bearing the heavy responsibilities of the priesthood.

Let me give some more concrete examples. The priest is compromised when he is lazy. Laziness is a trait that has to be overcome in a serious way because we live in a culture of leisure. It is a false leisure. All of us have the necessity, I would say the responsibility, to recreate in the truest sense of the word. That is not the question. Laziness is doing what I need to do to get by and nothing more. It is fulfilling obligations at the bare minimum in order to do what I want to do.

The lazy priest rushes from Mass to catch the game or his show. The lazy priest abandons the confessional to do something fun. The work ethic in our culture has been severely compromised by the cult of leisure. We work not to fulfill a mission, but to have the resources to spend on having fun. Laziness overwhelms the priest, making him a mere functionary.

God can use the mere functionary character of his priesthood, but at what price to his own dignity and at what cost to his reputation? The lazy priest makes excuses not to go to the hospital, the nursing home, not to make communion calls. He “says” Mass. He gets homilies off the Internet. He gives lip service to his responsibilities so he can do what he wants.

The lazy priest is no leader. Neither is he a follower. He is a loungeur and thus compromises the dignity of which he is possessed. The lazy priest holds the treasure of his priesthood in a reclining chair. Then he wonders why no one shows him the proper deference due his office. After all, he has sacrificed so much to be a priest.

The perception of the dignity of the priest is compromised also by crudeness. This can take several forms. One is poor hygiene and poor grooming. The priest looks slovenly and then protests that his appearance is the result of a commitment to evangelical poverty. This is nonsense. While we may reject the Wesleyan axiom that cleanliness is next to godliness, cleanliness is respectful. I show respect for the people I meet by appearing clean-shaven and not reeking of body odor.

Crudeness can also take the form of impropriety of speech. The use of crude and shocking language is not prophetic; it is ignorant. It demonstrates a lack of humanity, particularly when it is directed to a sexually exploitative purpose. No one can take the celibate commitment of a priest seriously when he is continually using foul language and telling off-color jokes. Refinement of speech is not unmanly; it is human.

Another way in which the perception of the priesthood is compromised is a lack of professionalism. Some priests believe that, because of their missionary character, they should not be held to the same standards of practice as other professionals. They can dress in a careless manner. They can make and break appointments. They can be late for meetings. They can fail to show up all together. The priest believes that he will be forgiven and, of course, many times he is.

The unprofessional priest is also unreliable as a leader. He is not respected by his parishioners or by his peers. While the rules of the professional world and its standards are not the end of the priest's life, they are certainly a means by which he gains credibility. A lack of professionalism in the priest is not a sign of inspiration; it is a sign of disdain for those around him. Like the rules of etiquette,

professional behavior is essential for the common good. It facilitates the mission.

Another means of compromising the inherent dignity of the priesthood is the expression of an anti-intellectual bias. A number of years ago, I was speaking to a group of priests about the Second Vatican Council. We were having a discussion of the various documents and the way in which those documents had been realized in the decades since the Council.

After the conference, one of the priests came up to me laughing to himself and confessed that he had never read a document of the Council and that he operated on pastoral instinct. I told him that I felt sorry for his parishioners. Sometimes, even in the seminary, we can be caught up in a kind of cultural anti-intellectualism. We wonder, even aloud, about the necessity of the study that we undertake here for our future pastoral engagements.

I say, if you do not take your studies seriously, even if you are not the best student, if you do not take seriously the need to know the teachings of the Church and the Tradition, I say I hope to God you never have any parishioners to inflect your opinions upon. The damage wrought by the material heresy of well-meaning, anti-intellectual priests is real and devastating to the fabric of the Body of Christ.

The cavalier attitude that some priests take toward doctrine is not only shocking, it is sinful. As priests, we bear a tremendous responsibility for the orthodoxy of the Christian people and that orthodoxy cannot be of our own construction. It must be forged and forged hard at the anvil of the Church's intellectual life, a life to which all of us, no matter our native talents, have access.

One manifestation of this anti-intellectual attitude is cultural narrowness. A cultural perspective that is woven together from distended threads of popular music, the Internet, social networking, commercial television, etc. is not likely to weave a tapestry of inspiration. A cultural bias that is earthbound is not going to offer us the opportunities for cultivating such practicalities as a celibate life or a literate imagination for preaching and teaching.

It is commonplace in our society to disdain higher culture. We scoff at those who care about art, music, literature and theater. We laugh at the pretensions of those who seek the things that are above. And yet, it is these things that have the potential to unite us as a people by appealing to our better selves, whereas the manifestations of a low, fanciful culture merely reinforce the self-gratification and selfishness that tear at the fiber of the Body of Christ.

The dignity of the priesthood is compromised by too close an identification with popular culture. We think that “being in touch” with the world is inspirational to our youth. I would suggest that familiarity breeds contempt and that young people are more often inspired by alternatives to the dead-end culture that surrounds them.

Another means by which the perception of the dignity of the priesthood is jeopardized is a lack of engagement with the spiritual life. An old adage in the world of formation is that after ordination, the prayer life is the first thing to go. Outside the structures of seminary life, the priest simply cannot find the time or the energy to pray.

We make excuses for neglecting the breviary and the holy hour. We live into falsehoods such as: “my work is my prayer.” We discover all of a sudden that we are burnt out and the pastoral life has little meaning. Why should it if we have discarded the essential relationship with God expressed in prayer that gives meaning to our pastoral engagement?

We fool ourselves if we do not think prayer is the key to priestly life and service. We fool ourselves here if we are not convinced that a dedication to prayer is the most important thing for me to do. We fool ourselves if we believe that people do not know when we no longer pray, when our spiritual life is not only dry but dead.

We compromise the dignity of the priesthood when we continue to present ourselves as that bridge between heaven and earth and fail to acknowledge that the bond has been broken by our lack of prayer.

We also endanger the dignity of the priesthood when we refuse to accept responsibility for the pastoral mission to which we have been called. This can take several forms. One is a refusal to accept the unique role of the priest as leader, servant leader to be sure, but leader, and to align ourselves to an unserviceable egalitarianism.

Another way is to fail to engage the work of God in a particular place because I am constantly looking forward to the next, seemingly better place. It is amazing to me how many of our young clergy today are ordained for the transitional priesthood and refuse to take their place in the vineyard of the Lord in the expectation that some better venue will soon be opening.

It is amazing to me how many young priests today are willing to sacrifice their name, and indeed their souls, by stepping on the backs of lower men to rise to the top of chancery officialdom in some of the poorest dioceses in the country.

The obverse of this refusal to accept responsibility is rank clericalism. I use this expression “rank clericalism” intentionally. An authentic clerical spirit recognizes the uniqueness of the vocation and accepts the responsibility that that uniqueness necessitates. Rank clericalism claims privilege without responsibility.

Rank clericalism is more about the dress than the service. Rank clericalism insists upon respect without offering. Rank clericalism is all about the look of the thing and nothing about the substance of the thing. Rank clericalism legislates according to tastes. Rank clericalism exercises power without consultation. This kind of clericalism destroys perceptions of the dignity of the priesthood by being all about me.

Brothers and sisters, are we not aware of these issues? Have we not witnessed the daily damage done by those whose callous disregard for the dignity of the priesthood calls all of our credibility into question? Today we face a mighty challenge, but a worthy one. How do we restore the dignity of the priesthood? In my closing conference last year, I commented on the ordination rite and described the dignity of the priesthood in these words:

It is the dignity of a human person fully alive insofar as

the human personality of the priest forms a living bridge to service. In the central part of the Rite of Ordination, we rise from the dirt of the ground to the company of the angels in the dignity of the priesthood. Here we might do well to remember the sacramental act that brought us into the wonder of discipleship, our baptisms. In baptism we hear these words: “with the presentation of the white garment the outward sign of your invisible dignity.” Bring it unstained into the wedding banquet of eternal life. This is true dignity, the dignity for which we prepare, after which we strive in this house of formation, this seedbed of God’s generosity. It is the dignity of a man inebriated by ceaseless prayer, whose calling is always beyond. It is the dignity of a man of keen intellect who knows well the masterful story of the Church’s great intellectual tradition. It is the dignity of a man who knows himself and is not afraid of himself. It is the dignity of a man who does not fear the sexual energy that God has given him, that relational energy that allows him to have profound, holy contact with others. It is the dignity of a man who does not shy away from others, is not threatened by others, but embraces others as brothers and sisters. It is the dignity of a man of culture, a man who has lifted his gaze from the gutters of the ephemeral and raised it to the transcendent to that which carries him beyond his little lot. It is the dignity of a man who has realized that the only greatness in any man is the ability to make those around him, the poor, the lonely, the outcast, to make them feel great. It is the dignity of a man whose clarity of vision is such that he can see the arch of heaven in the threatening jaws of an earthly hell. It is the dignity of a complete man whose completeness is augmented by the grace of a sacrament. It is the dignity of a man who will never take advantage of God’s people because he has been given something that they have not. The dignity to turn privilege to tireless service, the dignity to celebrate the sacraments with reverence in accord

with the teachings of the Church and not seek to celebrate himself in celebrating God's mysteries. It is the dignity of hope in a world of fatalism, joy in the face of disappointment, prayer in light of human failure, reconciliation in the wake of sin. It is the dignity of a man who can pick others up from out of their degradation, their imprisonment to sin, because he himself has felt countless times, witnessed in his own breast, the powerful words of restoration: I absolve you. It is the dignity of a man who is as free in giving as he is grateful for what he has freely been given. It is the dignity of a man who would never embarrass another person, never purposefully cause harm, never put himself before the others. It is the dignity of a man who knows in the first instance not to call upon his own resources, but upon the name of Christ, the name of Mary, the names of the saints who washed over him as he lay prostrate in the dust. It is the dignity of a man who will walk the path until the end, who will live with integrity and die with holy beauty because, in the last instance, in the last breath he draws, after all the trials of life are over, after all the disappointments are reckoned, after all the hours of the Church's endless round of prayers are recited, after all the shining consecrations are dimmed, after all the throes of this life have been overcome, he will find dignity in the arms of the Father and peace at the last because he was, until the temporal end, true to who God called him to be eternally, a priest.

These lofty ambitions are not beyond our reach.

How do we understand the dignity of the priesthood? We might do well to look at the preface of the Eucharistic prayer for the Chrism Mass of Holy Thursday:

Christ gives the dignity of a royal priesthood to the people He has made His own. From these, with a brother's love, He chooses men to share His sacred ministry by the laying on of hands. He appointed them to renew in His name the sacrifice of redemption as they set before Your family His

paschal meal. He calls them to lead Your holy people in love, nourish them by Your word, and strengthen them through the sacraments. Father, they are to give their lives in Your service and for the salvation of Your people, as they strive to grow in the likeness of Christ and honor You by their courageous witness of faith and love.

In our desire to comprehend the dignity of the priesthood, we might also turn to St. Paul, who shows us so eloquently how those configured in Christ are to exercise their ministry.

Brothers and sisters:

As your fellow workers, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

For he says: *In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.*

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

We cause no one to stumble in anything, in order that no fault may be found with our ministry; on the contrary, in everything we commend ourselves as ministers of God, through much endurance, in afflictions, hardships, constraints, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, vigils, fasts; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in unfeigned love, in truthful speech, in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness at the right and at the left; through glory and dishonor, insult and praise.

We are treated as deceivers and yet are truthful; as unrecognized and yet acknowledged; as dying and behold we live; as chastised and yet not put to death; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing and yet possessing all things.

How is this not a plan to realize, in the expression of divine love, the dignity of the holy priesthood?

What is attained by the pursuit of dignity? When we truly intend to express in our lives the dignity that is within the priesthood, there are inevitable results. The first is a sense of coherence. When



we authentically seek our nature, there must follow an irenic sensibility that flows from that authenticity. As long as we continually try to live a double life, we will find no peace of mind.

Then there is a sense of integration, of seeing the various components of our lives in tandem with our authentic baptismal vocations as followers of Christ. There is also in the expression of this dignity a kind of evangelical attractiveness, an ability to win souls for Christ through the example of our lives.

My dear brothers and sisters, that is why we are here. We are here to win souls for God. We are here to express with joy and confidence that boundless blessing that has been bestowed on us through the redemptive act of Christ. We are here to give witness to the power of his cross.

We are here to rejoice in the joy of his resurrection. We are here not to perpetuate the mistakes of the past, be those personal or communal, but to learn from those mistakes for the sake of conversion, our conversion and the conversion of the souls entrusted to our care.

We are here to draw others into the glorious vision of heaven that we have received through our intimacy with God in a committed life of prayer.

We are here to demonstrate the authentic dignity by which the glory of God is manifested in the person truly alive.

Brothers and sisters, we are here to become saints, to see our lives, our mundane lives, our sinful lives, drawn upward and upward to that full dignity of the saints.

All of us here bear the incredible responsibility of being more than the world, in its cynicism, expects us to be. The future is in our hands. The future is in your hands.

And so I welcome you to a new formation year, a year of challenge, a year of expectation and a year of hope. Will we? Can we satisfy all of the demands imposed upon us, the responsibility incumbent upon us to restore the dignity of the priesthood?

We will and we can with the help of God, his angels and his saints

and in particular that exemplar of human dignity, the Theotokos and Blessed Virgin Mary, upon whom we cast all our cares.

# 7. Prayer: Foundation of Our Lives and Work - Rector's Conference, Fall 2011

In my rector's conferences for this formation year, I would like to focus on the gift of vocation, or rather the idea of vocation as a gift. In his very interesting book on the Catholic priesthood, Matthew Levering focuses on the centrality of giftedness and receptivity in the exercise of God's salvific power. All that we have comes from God, whether we acknowledge that central truth or not. All that we need to do is to offer a proper thanksgiving for his manifold gifts.

Our lives become confused when we fail to seriously recognize this giftedness, when we fail to acknowledge that we are nothing without Him. And yet, our dilemma must be that of the psalmist who asked: "How can I make a return to the Lord for all the good He has given me?" How do we respond to God's singular invitation to intimacy? Obviously, the answer is first and foremost in prayer.

What is prayer? Prayer is the activity of cultivating a relationship with God. Theologically speaking, it is "raising one's mind and heart to God," according to St. John Damascene. Or perhaps we prefer St. Therese of Lisieux: "For me prayer is an upward leap of the heart, an untroubled glance toward heaven, a cry of gratitude and love which I utter from the depths of sorrow as well as from the heights of joy."

As the cultivation of that essential relationship, prayer is the foundation of our lives and work as disciples of Jesus and a fortiori as priests. There is no priestly life without prayer. In the last chapter of St. John's Gospel, Jesus confronts St. Peter after the events of the passion, events over which St. Peter had reason to be trebly ashamed.

Our Lord asks St. Peter a series of questions: "Do you love me?" To St. Peter's affirmative answer, Jesus then gives the commission to

feed, tend, feed. The intention of this conditional question is clear: Ministry depends upon one thing, a firm and stable relationship with God in Christ. We may undertake the laudable tasks of counseling, teaching, guiding and serving others in a context in which faith is not a part of the equation. These things are not ministry.

Ministry demands that the Divine Persons be in the midst of the human activity and this is only accomplished through a relationship of love with those same Divine Persons. We do what we do as disciples of Christ when we make Christ the center of what we do. This centrality is cultivated in an active life of prayer.

There are many ways to engage the life of prayer and all of these ways can be fruitful. I will speak more directly about these various ways below. First, however, I would like to point to the central reality of a life of prayer and the principle motivation for cultivating a life of prayer: It is simply the understanding that: You are not alone. This is the cornerstone of prayer. Jesus said: And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.

This is, in effect, the essence of all prayer and all theology grounded in the Holy Trinity. It is the essence of God's love for us, which is so great that He gave his only son. You are not alone. You do not have to be alone.

And of course, it is a message that, all of us, young and old, rich and poor alike, long to hear, a message that so many in our world today are desperate to hear. That is why we pray. Our willingness to pray indicates that we are desperate to be connected, because loneliness is epidemic.

We see it in the empty eyes of the youthful victim of abuse, the victim of self-serving self-sufficiency, the men and women who walk the streets of this city in search of a little dignity, a little relief from the harsh reality of the urban inferno.

Where do we experience the need for prayer?

We see it in the eyes of the aged and abandoned, the victim of the cult of youth, of isolation, desperation, fear, in those besieged by self-doubt, betrayal, loss. For them we must pray.

We hear it in the cries of the poor, the homeless, the marginalized, the outcast, the voices of those who cry for bread, for acceptance, for homeland. We hear it in the philosophy of libertarianism, of self-determination, of manifest destiny, self-reference, in false and pernicious understandings of freedom, of choice.

We know it in our culture's insistence on rugged individualism, popularism, pioneerism, so-called prophecy. We know what loneliness is because we feel the pinch of its skeletal fingers in the very heart of our being, in the vacancy of the stare that confronts us daily in the mirrors of our self-perception.

We know what loneliness is because we, though wounded, continue to wound by turning our back on the blankness of the other's, our neighbor's pleading. In spite of the endless rhetoric from the cult of self-sufficiency and individualism, we still long for love, long to feel it in the presence of others, the warm breath of human contact, human kindness.

We long to know it in our care for our brothers and sisters, in the awkward gestures of friendship and fellow feeling, of fraternal care engendered by friends, by family, even by strangers. We long to be a part of something, to be accepted in spite of our awkwardness, and so we pray to gain access to the throne of grace, the font of Love Himself.

And when we cannot find that place of belonging, we seek it in importune places or we hide our loneliness in mind- and spirit numbing substances, in experiences cyberic, in the comfortability of sin. But try as we might, we cannot escape the truth, the truth that is written in the very marrow of our being: we need to be in relationship, with God, with Christ and with the community.

We yearn for company, for understanding, for love, for human affection, for warmth, for a gentle hand, a consoling smile. Prayer brings that. We long for love, respect; prayer is the source of that. In all of our efforts on behalf of building relationships, we know the outcome of our prayer is a single insight. God is Love. God is here.

God is relational; that is his nature, communion, and love. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, infinitely present to one another.

We present to the Trinity in prayer. Through the Trinity, present to one another. Prayer is involved in a gracious economic outreach to a needy humanity. Engaged in an endlessly varying polyphony. Entangled in the mystery of persons and habits. Entrenched in the life of the world and in the beatitude of heaven. In touch with the longing of humanity. In contact with our deepest desires. Prayer makes God present to us. Prayer is Real Presence. Catholicism is authentic humanism.

And we, who are created in his likeness, may also be, can also be, must also be, involved in the lives of others. Engaged in the messiness of the human condition. Entangled in the joys and sorrows, the hopes and despairs, of our fellow pilgrims. Entrenched in life, in the pure essence of living. In touch with the misery of the world. In contact with the throbbing pulse of creation.

This encounter with the Divine Reality, which is also an encounter with our neighbor, is an encounter with our deepest selves, our deepest desires, our most profound hopes, expressed in a life of purposeful prayer. Once we understand the essence of prayer, we must then ask ourselves how to pray.

What is the best way to pray? There is no best way to pray. As seminarians and priests, we are given certain parameters to our prayer, but these are few. The late Holy Father Blessed John Paul II once said: "How to pray? This is a simple matter. I would say: Pray any way you like as long as you do pray." St. Josemaria Escriva said: "Prayer is the foundation of the edifice. All prayer is powerful."

As in any relationship, prayer is speaking and listening. How successful can a relationship be with another person when there is no listening? And yet, we often try that trick with God. Saying prayers becomes our default mode. Yet, God has infinitely more to say to us than we have to say to Him, especially in light of his omniscience.

As Pope John Paul II said: "In a conversation there are always an 'I' and a 'thou' or 'you.' In this case ... the 'Thou' is more important,

because our prayer begins with God ... We begin to pray, believing that it is our own initiative that compels us to do so. Instead, we learn that it is always God's initiative within us ...”

Listening to God can be risky, however, because in our heart of hearts we know what God is asking us to do. Perhaps we do not want to do it. Like the lazy husband who claims he could not hear his wife asking him 15 times to take out the garbage, we sit back and rely on our powers of self-deception in the essentially facile process of discernment.

Prayer also demands time and energy. In truth, it is the only thing that we can devote ourselves to that will truly profit us. Our Fr. Hilary Ottensmeyer is famous for saying: “Until you are convinced that prayer is the best use of your time, you will not find time for prayer.” Truth indeed.

Prayer is speaking and listening. It is also presence, as I mentioned above. Relationship is relational because the parties are present to one another. In human relationships, we feel the pain of separation from our friends, our family and our loved ones. How can we not feel cosmically that same pain of separation from our Source of Life? The best practices of speaking and listening in prayer do not come naturally; they come through disciplined practice. No one can expect mystical experience in their beginning practice of prayer.

The development of skills for speaking and listening to God in prayer overflows into the life of the community. The way we speak and listen in prayer and the quality of that speaking and listening helps us in our lives with one another. The speech of prayer informs community life and what is experienced in community life; its speech patterns may well be an indicator of the quality of prayer.

In Chapter 4 of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, the Father of Monks speaks of the necessity of the disciple:

To guard one's tongue against evil and depraved speech. Not to love much talking. Not to speak useless words or words that move to laughter. Not to love much or boisterous laughter. To listen willingly to holy reading. To devote oneself frequently to prayer.

Good practices in speaking and listening in the community arise from prayer. Prayer informs our way of engaging others in the community. Prayer also helps us discern challenges in this area that every community faces.

In the Letter of James, we read:

So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue – a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

In a community, gossip, murmuring and idle speech are poisonous. They are toxic. In a community such as ours, we live in close quarters. We know each other. We know more than we need to know. As the philosopher said: We all know where our goats are tied.

Close living offers us the opportunity to love one another in more profound ways. It can also be the occasion of useless talk, inappropriate humor, ridicule and murmuring against the system. This is something that can be corrected, but only in a spirit of prayer, and that prayer requires perseverance. As Blessed John Paul II once said:

Prayer gives us strength for great ideals, for keeping up our faith, charity, purity, generosity; prayer gives us strength to rise up from indifference and guilt, if we have had the misfortune to give in to temptation and weakness. Prayer gives us light by which to see and to judge from God's perspective and from eternity. That is why you must not give up on praying.

There are many ways to pray. In a recent talk I gave on the question of theology and Tradition, I mentioned that our engagement with the life and teaching of the Church can be conceived in three ways: 1) directive; 2) disciplinary; and 3)



devotional. In that context, my discussion was on what constituted doctrinal versus less-than-doctrinal concerns in the life of the Church.

The distinctions apply equally to the question of prayer and, in particular, our context within this community of faith and by extension in the holy priesthood. Directive prayer may be said to have two aspects. The first is the necessity of prayer as a generic reality. To be disciples, we must pray. I have already discussed this necessity above, but it bears repeating. We must pray.

How that prayer looks and the direction it takes may have the aspects of individual preferences (for the most part), but we must pray. Failure to pray is a failure to engage the very meaning of discipleship. Prayer may at times be dry, but it can never be absent. Prayer may have consolation and desolation as its prominent features, but it can never be disregarded.

Within a life of prayer, worship is the primary form of directive prayer. We must worship God. What does this entail? In the law of Christ, it means first and foremost a sincere desire to offer homage and supplication to our Divine Creator. Concretely, it means praying with the Church in the Holy Eucharist. In a directive way, the Eucharist is the spine of all prayer.

Famously, the Second Vatican Council defines the Eucharist as the “source and summit” of our lives as followers of Jesus. It is also the source and summit of prayer. All prayer, whether the public prayer of the Church or our private prayer, leads us back to the Mass.

The Fathers held that the Eucharist makes the Church. This tells us something essential about prayer. The Eucharist is the central feature of a life devoted to cultivating a relationship with God, because it connects us intimately with God. It connects us with the saving action of Christ on the cross. It connects us to his resurrection. It connects us to the events of the Upper Room, both the Last Supper and the Day of Pentecost.

The Eucharist fills us with the love of God by filling our very bodies with the Bread of Life, which alone gives meaning to this world’s travails. The Eucharist also essentially connects us to one

another. It makes us brothers and sisters in the One who is broken, poured out, shared and consumed. Our essential prayer to God goes through the saving acts of Christ and grabs on to others. Prayer is relationship and the Eucharist is relationship par excellence. Certainly, the saints have always known this.

In the words of the Angelic Doctor:

Material food first changes into the one who eats it, and then, as a consequence, restores to him lost strength and increases his vitality. Spiritual food, on the other hand, changes the person who eats it into itself. Thus the effect proper to this Sacrament is the conversion of a man into Christ, so that he may no longer live, but Christ lives in him.

Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has also commented that:

The Eucharist is a “mystery of faith” par excellence: “the sum and summary of our faith.” The Church’s faith is essentially a eucharistic faith, and it is especially nourished at the table of the Eucharist. Faith and the sacraments are two complementary aspects of ecclesial life. (*Sacramentum Caritatis*, 6)

In connection with seminary formation and the priesthood, we often hear of the need to cultivate a “Eucharistic Spirituality.” While there is no gainsaying this insight, what precisely is a Eucharistic Spirituality? First, I would say that it is seeing the Eucharist precisely for what it is: a cosmic engagement with the very core of our being and an essential element of the divine plan for creation. In other words, the celebration of the Eucharist, as I mentioned above, is essential to the life of the world.

Second, a Eucharistic Spirituality is an engaging, active attention to the presence of Christ not only in the Holy Mass but in its effects, that is, in the world. The disciple of a Eucharistic Spirituality sees Christ not only as a necessary metaphysical element to the well-being of creation, but an essential social element as well. The social order is never complete without Christ, and the Eucharist is the authentic harbinger of the real presence of Christ in that same social order.

Third, a Eucharistic Spirituality acknowledges the need for transformation. Just as the elements of bread and wine are transformed, so should we look to be transformed in the economy of conversion; and we should further look for the world to be transformed through the economy of salvation. This dependence upon transformation gives the devotee of the Eucharist a particular insight, not only about the liturgical celebration but about the world, every person in it and, indeed, himself.

The insight is this: Things are not what they seem to be. In the holy Eucharist, we must train our minds, and indeed our spirits, to look beyond the veil of accident to see the *veritas*, the Truth of what is present. This is a pastoral insight as well. We must look beyond the accidents of our lives to the Truth of Christ present. It applies to our self-perception as well.

Therefore, a Eucharistic Spirituality is also an authentic psychology, an authentic sociology and an authentic moral code. In the throes of a Eucharistic Spirituality, we learn to expect miracles of conversion. We accept a willing suspension of immediate judgment.

Armed with these insights, what are the best practices for our engagement with this essential prayer of the Church? First, we must take the Holy Mass seriously. The Mass is not another part of our day. It is the center of our day. It demands our attention, our careful consideration and our equally careful preparation.

The solemn celebration of the Eucharist engages our imagination and our will. We see in it the culmination of our morning movement and the source of energy for the rest of the day. Preparation for the Eucharist means several things. It means observing the Eucharistic fast carefully. It means being on time and ready to pray, having predisposed ourselves to engage the miraculous.

It means full, conscious and active participation. It means praying the responses. It means singing with the community at the prescribed times, even if the music may not be attuned to my particular tastes. It means suspending a critical attitude about

things I really know very little about in order to authentically worship God in the assembly.

Finally, it means a reference to the others. The Eucharist is not our private prayer. It is a prayer that we undertake with the community. Reference to the community in the context of prayer means doing what the community does. It means praying with one another. It means regulating our voices to form a single voice of communal prayer.

Connected to the holy Eucharist is the practice of Eucharistic Adoration and, most particularly, the Holy Hour. While not a directive aspect of the life of prayer, it does hold a pride of place and is a treasured part of our Catholic tradition and a very living devotion for a generation of Catholics today.

The celebration of the Eucharist is an active expression of a Eucharistic Spirituality. Adoration is a ministry of presence and cultivates the sincere love of God in our willingness to be present to Him in the Blessed Sacrament, whether reserved in the tabernacle or exposed in the monstrance. The time spent with Our Lord in adoration is a privileged time. As Archbishop Sheen once remarked, “The Holy Hour is time spent with our Lord. If faith is alive, no further reason is needed.”

Regarding the Holy Hour, the Cure of Ars once remarked, “How pleasing to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is the hour that we steal from our occupations, from something of no use, to come and pray to Him, to visit Him, to console Him.” Archbishop Sheen said, “Ultimately the Holy Hour will make us practice what we preach.”

The Holy Hour is a time of presence, of being with and, as such, must not be crowded with other activities. Each day’s Holy Hour should be an opportunity to spend time in the presence of the Beloved and a time to calm the clamor of the day. To me, this is an essential aspect of formation, being still and quiet with God.

In terms of best practices, therefore, the Holy Hour should not be a time for doing reading related to classroom work. It should not be filled with all kinds of vocal and mental prayer. It should be a time “to be” with God. This concept of the Holy Hour instills in the

seminarian and priest that essential element of presence that is so necessary, particularly in a world filled with so much unnecessary activity and a priestly life filled with so much busy work.

In addition to worship, a directive activity of Christian spirituality is reading the Scriptures. Developing a relationship with the Bible is key to priestly formation. The Bible is God's direct speech to us. St. Jerome says that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. This is a theme reiterated by Pope Benedict in his apostolic exhortation on the Word of God in the life of the Church.

We know God in and through the scriptures and our active engagement with the Bible is key to our life of faith. Best practices for scripture include daily reading of the Bible, as well as good commentaries. Of course, in the life of the priest, this also takes the form of homily preparation. For seminarians, it is a good practice to review the readings for Mass each day, perhaps writing down some ideas for what the scripture passages suggest to you.

For deacons and those who are actively preparing homilies, using the daily readings to inform not only what I plan to say as a preacher but how I plan to live as a preacher becomes essential. A key element to a scriptural spirituality is the community. As Pope Benedict tells us in *Verbum Domini*:

The Bible was written by the People of God for the People of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Only in this communion with the People of God can we truly enter as a “we” into the heart of the truth that God himself wishes to convey to us.

These two aspects of spirituality, worship in the holy Eucharist and scripture, are essential elements of being a Christian. Now I will turn to the second category I spoke of above, that of discipline. There are certain aspects of the spiritual life that are a part of our world, not by virtue of a universal imperative but by virtue of the discipline of the Church. The Liturgy of the Hours is just such an aspect.

The Liturgy of the Hours is the daily prayer of the Church. It is a prayer that connects us in an essential way to the Jewish roots

of our faith. “Seven times a day I praise you,” the psalmist says (Psalm 119:164). St. Paul exhorts Christians to pray without ceasing (I Thessalonians 5:17). This is the will of God. The Liturgy of the Hours is the rich tradition of prayer that allows for all of these goods to be realized. Again, it is the prayer of the Church. As we read in the General Instruction to the Liturgy of the Hours:

Christian prayer is above all the prayer of the whole human community, which Christ joins to himself (cf. SC 83). The Lord Jesus and his body pray together, as if in chorus, to the Father. This communion in prayer will be clearer if those who pray the Hours study and meditate upon Scripture, in reading which our word and God’s word are at one.

Additional aspects of the Liturgy of the Hours are to be noted. It constantly gathers and presents to the Father the petitions of the whole Church. All pastoral activity must be drawn to completion in the Liturgy of the Hours and must flow from its abundant riches. In this chorus of prayer, the Church more perfectly manifests what she is, for her identity as body of Jesus is kept continually in actuation; the injunction to pray without ceasing, which cannot be fulfilled by any one individual, is corporately fulfilled by the Church as a community.

That having been said, the practice of the Liturgy of the Hours is not mandated for all of the faithful. It is required of the deacon and priest. As a necessary discipline in ordained life, the practice of the Liturgy of the Hours should begin in earnest right now. Best practices for praying the Liturgy of the Hours are first to attend carefully to the Office in common that we celebrate in the seminary.

Devote your energy to the Office. Be on time and prepared. Before Morning Prayer, everyone should pray privately the invitatory psalm. The Office of Readings may be done at any time of the day. One of the daytime Offices is required, as is compline. Many of these Offices we will pray privately. Private recitation of the Office is a challenge at times, particularly in the busy lives of the seminarian and the priest.

It is essential, however, that we make the time for this sanctifying work. The Liturgy of the Hours should be prayed from day one in the seminary. We should be getting used to it, making it a habit. Is it always rewarding? Honestly, it is not. Is it rewarding in terms of the fulfillment of an obligation? Absolutely.

The Holy Church asks us to pray the Liturgy of the Hours in union with all others. We do so in solidarity, in the name of those who cannot or will not pray, and in pursuit of a catholicity that only authentic prayer can bring. Finding fruitful ways to pray the Liturgy of the Hours is a conversation each of you should be having with your spiritual director, your dean or any priest or deacon. Learn the Liturgy of the Hours and make it your own.

The final category of theological truths that I mentioned in my talk earlier this year was devotional. Something is devotional when it fulfills a particular spiritual ideal or need. Different persons have different personalities. I may enjoy one activity, such as watching a film, with one friend and another activity, such as running a marathon, with another.

Devotions are about preference, about emphases and, at some level, about personal tastes. A devotional life is necessary for the priest, but every devotion is not necessary. We have the freedom to exercise our preference for various devotions, and that freedom should be observed. No one should be made to feel inferior if they are not connected to my particular devotional practice.

We should invite others to experience our devotional lives, but not compel them to do so. We may like certain devotions and find them meaningful. Everything is not for everyone. One may practice *lectio divina*, another meditation, a third a particular chaplet. Someone else may be inspired by the Stations of the Cross or novena prayers.

Another important devotion and work of mercy is prayer for the souls in purgatory. Prayer for the souls in purgatory and devotions connect us to the supernatural world, where the Church also lives. It is another important expression of the communal nature of prayer.

Finally, I would mention devotion to the saints and, in particular,

to Our Lady. These kinds of devotions take many different forms. In Marian devotion, certainly the rosary holds pride of place. It is a tested and true means of meditating on the mysteries of Christ. At the core of all Marian devotion is the central insight that Our Lady holds a particular place in the history of our salvific relationship with God in Christ.

Just as we cannot fathom our Christian faith without her willingness to engage the Word in a powerful, corporeal way, so our prayer, as a life of cultivated relationship, needs her presence. Without Mary, historically, there would be no Incarnate Word. Without Mary daily in our prayer, how can we see the importance of that Incarnate Word in our momentary activity? As a community of faith, we, too, need Mary as a patron and guide for the work of formation here.

Most days we have the opportunity to pray the Angelus prayer together. This prayer recalls that central role of Our Lady in the history of salvation. It connects us to her powerful intercession near Christ. In terms of best practices for devotional prayer: explore. Find out what suits you. This is the nature of devotions, the legitimate exercise of personal preferences.

However, find some way to connect to these beautiful expressions of that core relationship with God through prayer. Brothers and sisters, prayer forms the center of what we do here. It shows us the open heart of Christ and connects us essentially with one another in the Body of that same Christ.

It shows us also a central Catholic truth that lies at the heart of our theology and practice of prayer: We are not alone. Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, the Church militant, the Church suffering and the Church triumphant. A life of cultivated prayer and methodical prayer leads to the greatest of virtues, the virtue of zeal. The word “zeal” comes from the Greek word for boiling. How apt an image. The good zeal of discipleship is well attested in Chapter 72 of the *Rule of St. Benedict*. I paraphrase:

This zeal, therefore, the seminarians should practice with the most fervent love. Thus they should anticipate one



another in honor (Rom. 12:10); most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character; vie in paying obedience one to another – no one following what he considers useful for himself, but rather what benefits another; tender the charity of brothers chastely; fear God in love; love their superiors and formators with a sincere and humble charity; prefer nothing whatever to Christ. And may He bring us all together to life everlasting!

# 8. St. Joseph, Model of Faith - Opening Conference, Fall

2012

Brothers and sisters, welcome to a new formation year. What a great honor, what a privilege it is to be here among you, trusting in God that the days ahead are going to be filled with blessings and opportunities. What brought you here? I warrant that it is the same thing that will sustain you in the coming weeks and months, and that is a conviction that God has called you here, at this time, for a deep consideration of your vocation.

How can it not be so? Brothers and sisters, we hope to create for you here an environment that will enable you to seriously consider who you are called to be, as God's own son, as his own daughter. As we begin this new formation year, I am very conscious of the fact that this is the year our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has established as the Year of Faith. In the spring semester, I offered some general reflections on the life of faith and the place of faith in the Church.

As we begin this new formation year, I would like to turn more specifically to some of the subject matter the Holy Father would like to see addressed during these months of blessing and opportunity. In a rather particular way, my future conferences this semester will focus on the anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. The Church will recognize this year the 50th anniversary of this great council, convoked by Blessed John XXIII. In the coming months, I would like to look at the four major documents of Vatican II.

Today, however, as we are launching this new formation year, I would like to spend some time meditating on St. Joseph, a figure who can truly show us the meaning of faith. So, I return today to a central question raised in this year: what is faith?

While we could examine this question from the standpoint of the great theological minds of our tradition, I would like to take an even more fundamental approach and ask the core question, the question that settles at the very heart of our work here: What is faith to us? How central is the life of faith to our lives? How can the figure of St. Joseph guide us in our journey of faith?

I want to begin today by proposing a bit of a dilemma. It is simply this: Faith is not simple. Regardless of the tenets of our more evangelical brethren, faith is not something either easily attained or maintained. Faith is complex and, as such, it incorporates actions proper to the entire person. It is not merely an act of the mind, or the spirit, or the will, or the body. It is a simultaneous action of all of these components.

That is to say, faith is a synthetic movement in the human person; it brings the person, often separated not only by modern categorizations, but also by modern conventions, into a unity, a completeness and a wholeness. It is easier to think of ourselves as mere machines or mere spirits or mere minds, but the human person cannot be reduced because the human person is, ultimately, unfathomable mystery.

Blessed John Paul II says this about St. Joseph: From the time of the Annunciation, both Joseph and Mary found themselves, in a certain sense, at the heart of the mystery hidden for ages in the mind of God, a mystery which had taken on flesh: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). Faith, as an action of the human person, is therefore a complex action, just as the human person is complex. Its life is also unfathomable mystery, not in the sense of being incapable of understanding, but in the sense of being infinitely understandable.

How was it for St. Joseph? A simple man, God nevertheless gave to St. Joseph a tremendous call, a tremendous gift to be sure, but also a tremendous call. How could St. Joseph, receiving God’s word in a dream, have comprehended the outcome of what the Lord, through an angel, proposed?

In a word, he could not. He had to step out in faith and in trust of

God's plan, How can it not be so with us? Do you know completely why you are here? I would wager not. God is not calling us to a complete understanding, at least not yet. As with St. Joseph, He is calling us to step out in faith. Accepting this premise, I will begin today by examining faith from three perspectives. Again, they are not exclusive or exhaustive; they are merely three angles for looking at the complex whole.

First: Faith is an action of the mind. In many places in his voluminous writings, the Canadian theologian Bernard Lonergan speaks of the types of conversion. For Lonergan, there are three types of conversion. The highest, or most complete, of these types is religious conversion, a conversion that seizes the entirety of the human person.

Prior to this culmination, however, the individual experiences other types of conversion. For example, he or she experiences a moral conversion, an experience that touches upon the action of the human person. Lonergan also speaks of intellectual conversion. This is an action of the mind, an action that apprehends the Truth of faith claims even if that Truth is not yet fully manifested in religious or moral conversion.

Lonergan's point is that there is a necessary intellectual component of faith, a need to know and have a convincing experience of Truth when wrestling theological ideas. Much of what you will do here will be focused on this type of conversion, of learning the Truth of our faith and making that Truth an integral part of your person, your personality.

Here we must wrestle with the intellectual tradition of our Church. Here we must learn to learn well not only for the sake of getting a grade, but more for the sake of improving our understanding, of learning to express ourselves in the Church's teaching. Here we must learn to be authentic men of study so as to become living witnesses of our study.

In the Rite of Ordination, the bishop says these words to the newly ordained deacon: Believe what you read, teach what you believe and practice what you teach. Reading and studying the

message of Christ expressed in the heart of the Church's intellectual life is essential to the task you someday hope to take up in the priesthood.

Here we might do well to contemplate the situation of St. Joseph. Of course, when we examine the evidence of the Gospel, we find next to nothing by way of background about St. Joseph. We must conjecture that he was a man of his time, nothing more, nothing less. He was a man with certain ideas and dreams about not only the life of faith, but about his personal life as well.

His intellectual world was circumscribed by his cultural situation, and yet, when offered in a dream, through the invitation of the angel, a daring, unprecedented opportunity, Joseph, the conventional man, did not hesitate to accept it. He was able to find within himself the resolve of intellectual conversion. He was able to overthrow his preconceived expectations.

It seems to me that is the project for us in this Year of Faith, to see in St. Joseph's ready assent to the audacious invitation of God a model for how we, in our skeptical environment, can learn to trust, even in our minds. Unlike the case of St. Joseph, intellectual conversion, according to Fr. Lonergan, is gradual; it comes in small doses over time and has a cumulative effect.

In this sense, Lonergan echoes the thought of Blessed John Henry Newman that the threads of conversion can seldom be delineated, that we come to faith and its complete acceptance as one would come to the intertwining of a rope, gradual, incremental, but solid. Again, when we consider the importance of intellectual conversion, we find a great deal of significance for the work we do here.

We cannot have faith, finally have faith, completely have faith, without some desire to engage the intellectual life of the Church. This is not to say that only the super-intelligent, only the high-minded, only those who study theology, can have true faith. Such an assertion would belie the experience of anyone who has engaged a true life of faith among many of the folks we find in our parishes.

Our understanding of the interface of faith and intellect is something like this: It is not how much you know, but how much

you desire to know. Many of our faithful are lacking in catechetical accomplishment, often through no fault of their own. Yet, in real faith, they desire to know more. So often catechesis is simply giving the faithful the tools they need to achieve a higher engagement with the intellectual aspects of faith.

Certainly St. Joseph, certainly Our Lady, teach us that. The very models of faith knew God and they knew Him at the level that incorporates but transcends the mind. One thing is clear from the Gospel evidence, however; their intellectual assent to faith had consequences, the consequences of a deeper knowledge.

What is crucially important here is the sanctification of daily life, a sanctification that each person must acquire according to his or her own state, and one which can be promoted according to a model accessible to all people: “St. Joseph is the model of those humble ones that Christianity raises up to great destinies; ... he is the proof that in order to be a good and genuine follower of Christ, there is no need of great things – it is enough to have the common, simple and human virtues, but they need to be true and authentic.”

Why does the desire to know more about faith come to the seeker after faith? It comes because the intellect is a part of the human person. When faith truly arrives in the life of the individual, it attracts all of the aspects of that person. There is no gainsaying the importance of learning in life. We learn day-by-day or we perish.

What is true of the natural man is also true of the spiritual man. We learn or we die. Is it not therefore imperative on the ministers of the Church not only to be learned, but to aid their parishioners, their brothers and sisters in faith, into a deeper understanding of the Truth exemplified in the Gospel of Christ?

In other words, people want to learn and we have the obligation to teach them. In order to teach them, we must know ourselves and thus we come to the impetus placed on intellectual formation in this seminary. Aside from the question of why our intellectual formation is essential, we must also ask how we learn.

Learning, again as a complex component of the whole person, takes place in many ways. It is incumbent upon the quality educator

to realize that all of those placed under his tutelage do not learn in the same way. Some learn in the classroom, others in the field of experience. Some learn through the mediation of literature and books, others through engaging processes with others.

There are two important aspects of this for our work here. The first is to be aware of how we learn and to provide opportunities for learning based upon this insight. In other words, we teachers have the responsibility to vary our teaching to meet the needs of those whose intellectual formation has been entrusted to us. Second, we need to challenge our students to learn in new ways. If you are an experiential learner, you need to gain greater comfort in the world of books. If you are a literary learner, you need to get out into the field more.

What is the outcome of our learning? There is only one outcome. It is Christ. In his important work, *The Idea of a University*, Cardinal Newman broaches the question as to why Christians should study all branches of learning. His conclusion is that everything, ultimately, leads us back to the source of not only learning, but life, God.

When we consider the significance of a work such as Newman's in our setting, we must conclude that theological education includes, of course, a familiarity with theology, systematic and pastoral, the history of the Church, sacred Scripture, canon law and the host of other particular disciplines that circumscribe our days here.

It also includes a more radical acquaintance with other forms of education, other branches of knowledge. Here I would especially mention literature, the arts, sciences, branches of "secular" history, as well as practical skills in various disciplines. We cannot expect, if we truly know our Creator, that He is to be found merely between the covers of theological tomes. His revelation is not so limited.

Learning to "read" God outside of the confines of specific Church genres is not only possible, as Newman has told us, it is necessary. We must learn to find God in the quotidian aspects of our existence. We must realize that God is as much in the engineering project, or the fiscal budget, as he is in Christology or Trinity or any other

discipline. Learning to read the presence of God outside of theological specificity, and finding Him in places where we might least expect, becomes the mark of the truly skilled theologian.

Anyone can find God in the writings of St. Thomas. Can we find God in culture, even popular culture? As real theologians, we must learn to do both. Because while we may lament that the folks to whom we will minister in the future may not read St. Thomas, they will be getting their images of God and their ideas about the Church from somewhere.

Can we teach them to read correctly the “signs of the times” as well as the eternal theology of the Holy Church? Can we see in the life of St. Joseph a clear example of this? Can we learn to do so ourselves? To me, this is the real challenge of intellectual faith today. It is a challenge for our work here and for you in your future ministry.

Second: Faith is an act of the spirit. The St. Joseph we encounter in the Gospel of St. Luke is very much a man of action. He takes his wife to Bethlehem. He finds a place for them in the crowded town. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, he takes his young family to Egypt to protect them from the maw of Herod.

As was the case with Joseph, faith for us is an act of the spirit. As Catholics, we may have more difficulty with this position. Faith as a spiritual movement within the person is not alien to the Catholic faith any more than an authentic spirituality is not alien to individual Catholics. It is true that we have often in our tradition been at a loss as to how to understand and incorporate this act of faith.

One reason for this is that a distinctive “charismatic” faith is often associated with the movement of faith in the individual. Catholicism, rightly, has given little consideration to personal acts of faith in favor of public and communal actions. We can see how the example of St. Joseph is followed here. He placed the needs of the others before his own selfish interests.

Nevertheless, the action of the Spirit has always been alive in the Church. When we consider faith as an act of the spirit, we might also



consider how these various actions engage one another. I grow and I learn more about my faith and I respond to this intellectual action by a movement within me, a recognition of the Truth active in my life. Faith as an act of the Spirit is also a kind of knowledge, but often a more esoteric, we might say synthetic, knowledge.

I know what I know, but I do not necessarily know how I know it. If we return to Cardinal Newman's analogy of the rope, faith as an act of the Spirit is more the use of the rope than its creation. Within this perspective, we see how the sense of charism is very much alive in the Church. The movement of the faith of the Spirit is the movement from what we know to a way of life.

This is a great challenge for our times, because we often believe culturally that there is a split between knowledge and action. We know something to be true, but we do not act on it. How can this be? If we do not act on it, then in a theological sense we do not accept the truth of the premise.

In a context such as ours, we might offer this analogy. If we accept the Truth about our vocations, then we will act accordingly. The faith of the mind will engage the faith of the Spirit. Our spiritual lives will come into alignment with the Truth we have acknowledged intellectually. When we truly understand what the Church teaches, we will stand under it.

This is not necessarily the product of greater education, unless we mean by education its basic meaning of "leading through." Some people learn by being led through the complexities of Aristotle, others through the complexities of life. What we learn, no matter how we learn it, is manifested in our character and in our actions.

The Gospels clearly describe the fatherly responsibility of Joseph toward Jesus. "For salvation – which comes through the humanity of Jesus – is realized in actions which are an everyday part of family life, in keeping with that 'condescension' which is inherent in the economy of the Incarnation. The gospel writers carefully show how in the life of Jesus nothing was left to chance, but how everything took place according to God's predetermined plan." Is it not so with

us? Of course it is, and in that St. Joseph can be our sure guide, our principal example.

Finally: Faith is an act of the body. We are accustomed to thinking of St. Joseph as a man of action. Faith is an act of the body is a principle readily at his disposal, not only in the coarse sense, but even in the more refined sense of his realization, his corporeal realization of what the service of God in the life of Jesus was to cost him in terms of the body.

It cost him the natural expectations of marriage and family. In his celibacy, Joseph shows us how the principle of corporeality functions at the very inception, the very conception of the life of the Church. The principle of bodiliness in our faith is something that comes to us rather late, but also rather forcefully in our Tradition.

In the history of the Church, bodiliness is a quality often viewed with suspicion. The early philosophical traditions upon which the foundations of our theological edifice were built were basically Platonic, thereby relegating the body to an arena of sinfulness, even danger. And yet, an authentic understanding of the Truth of our faith, the basic Truth of our faith, the Incarnation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, prohibits any problematic aspect of corporeality. As the Incarnate Word shared the particular natures of human and divine, so, too, his inheritance.

The principle of the bodiliness of our faith can be seen everywhere in a sacramental Church, most significantly in the physicality of the abiding presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament is not a symbol; it is the bodily, physical presence of the Savior of Humanity, a corporeality that must spill over into our situation as well.

The question of the bodiliness of faith is, therefore, not a theological question. If anything, it is a moral question. It touches upon what we, in sin, do with our bodies, not whether our bodies are holy. And if we follow this premise, do we not see other tenets as well? The mind is not bad or corrupt; it is what we do with our minds. Sin is not in the body. It is not in the mind. It is in the free will of the person.

Furthermore, in Joseph, the apparent tension between the active and the contemplative life finds an ideal harmony that is only possible for those who possess the perfection of charity. Following St. Augustine's well-known distinction between the love of the truth (*caritas veritatis*) and the practical demands of love (*necessitas caritatis*), [41] we can say that Joseph experienced both love of the truth – that pure contemplative love of the Divine Truth that radiated from the humanity of Christ – and the demands of love – that equally pure and selfless love required for his vocation to safeguard and develop the humanity of Jesus, which was inseparably linked to His Divinity.

In looking at the situation we encounter here, I want to reiterate that I estimate, more importantly the Church estimates, that “everything is formation.” Formation is not what you do in spiritual direction. It is not what you do in the classroom, in the reconciliation room or in the chapel only. Formation is what you do every moment of your lives. The act of faith is an act of the body as much as it is an act of the Spirit, an act of the mind.

Sometimes seminarians can become entrapped in the vision that these things are separate. My mind is good. I hold orthodox and right opinions. My spirit is pretty good. I say my prayers and do what I am supposed to do, even when no one is looking. My body is wretched. I struggle with various issues of health, impurity, a lack of discipline.

Chances are that there is more to this picture than often meets the eye. In his *Theology of the Body*, Blessed John Paul II noted that the discipline of the body is often tied to the discipline of the mind and the spirit. We only find completeness in ourselves when all of these aspects of faith are working together. We also note that this is seldom the case. It was true in the life of Joseph. It is seldom the case with us; we struggle.

We need formation, here and throughout our lives, not because we know everything but because we do not. What does that imply for us? Be open. Listen and learn. If you think you know everything,

you are already lost. You do not. We need spiritual formation because we are not complete; none of us are.

We cannot be complete this side of the beatific vision. Your spiritual director does not need for you to come to him time and again and rehearse your virtues. Neither does he need to hear what a wretch you are. What your spiritual director needs to hear is that you are a man who is struggling in the vortex of virtue and challenge. The vortex is a place where you can move and even journey. The stasis of inauthentic holiness or inauthentic wretchedness is not.

We need bodily formation. One thing I have tried to instill here, among others, is the importance of our environment. How many of you do not know that if you surround yourself with beauty, with holy images and with culture, you may learn, even by osmosis, to become a man in love with holiness?

If you surround yourself with that which is not holy but ephemerally stimulating, then you may never learn that connection between the sacred and secular that Newman spoke of so eloquently. You may never become a man of discernment. What you may become is a dichotomized man, a split man who operates on two different planes, the false plane of God and the true plane of his baseness. If you want to be a two-faced man, then leave today. We have no need to form you into what the Church already has too many of.

But if you want to be a true man of faith, then welcome here, struggle here. We will accept your struggles as long as you are honest. We will be with you in your doubts and your trials because all of us have doubts and trials. We will help you effectively discern your call, whatever that call may be, because of this we are fully convinced: God wants you. He wants you completely. He wants you today, especially since you are not yet perfect.

What does the Church expect in this year? I would say primarily, our Holy Father has called this Year of Faith for: enlivening, a new sense of sincerity, a New Evangelization.

The Second Vatican Council made all of us sensitive once again

to the “great things which God has done,” and to that “economy of salvation” of which St. Joseph was a special minister. Commending ourselves, then, to the protection of him to whose custody God “entrusted his greatest and most precious treasures,” [50] let us at the same time learn from him how to be servants of the “economy of salvation.”

May St. Joseph become for all of us an exceptional teacher in the service of Christ’s saving mission, a mission that is the responsibility of each and every member of the Church: husbands and wives, parents, those who live by the work of their hands or by any other kind of work, those called to the contemplative life and those called to the apostolate.

What does the Year of Faith mean for us? It is the renewal of the fundamental principles to which we are called. What are those principles? What governs our life here? I would say what governs our life is what governed the life of St. Joseph.

Honesty. Integrity. Holiness. Authentic humanity. Service. In a word, a Greek word. *Arête*. *Arête*, or excellence, was a central principle for our ancestors in faith. It is our premise of life as well in this seminary. We strive for excellence in what we do.

St. Joseph is an example of faith for us and an example of discipleship in a way highly productive for the priestly vocation. St. Joseph is a man whose aspirations and dreams were turned completely to the love of God and his nascent Church. In that, he offers us a path to follow, a way of achieving our goal of being completely at the disposal of God’s designs, God’s wishes.

In connection with this, to honor the Year of Faith, I have commissioned an image of St. Joseph to hang here, in our chapel.

What does this image show us?

The love of Joseph was an unquestioning love, a love that could have come only from a complete embrace of the grace of God.

The love of Joseph was so profound and intimate it offered to the child Jesus the basic needs of bodily and spiritual care.

The love of Joseph was a selfless love, a love that put the needs of

the body of Christ before his own needs, and in that as well he offers us an important example.

We see that love of Joseph in this image, powerful and intimate as it is.

Joseph is strong.

Joseph is tender.

Joseph is nurturing.

The infant is accepting.

The infant is in need.

The infant depends upon the foster father.

The infant is Christ and Christ is the Church and we are Joseph.

Brothers and sisters, if we can accomplish these realities, if we can make these principles living practices rather than dead precepts, then this Year of Faith will be a time of renewal for all of us, for our parishes, our dioceses, our religious communities, and for this seminary and school of theology.

What do we expect this year? We expect to change. We anticipate growth in life and the spirit. We look forward, always forward, with new vigor, new energy, new vitality, new friendship, new love. We plan for it and God gives the growth. He truly gives the growth.

We cannot accomplish these lofty goals alone. We do not need to. We have each other. We have our families and those who love and support us. We have our communities of faith and our dioceses. We have the saints, in particular, St. Joseph. What I find most interesting about St. Joseph is that, in the entire course of the Gospel accounts, in our complete understanding of him, he never speaks a word.

# 9. Dei Verbum - Rector's Conference for the Year of Faith, 2012

In my rector's conferences this semester and in anticipation of the Year of Faith promulgated by our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, I am focusing on the major documents of the Second Vatican Council. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the convocation of the Council by Blessed John XXIII. It is a momentous event and one that warrants some careful attention given to the documents that comprise the Council's teaching. In the further conferences for this semester, I will consider the other three major documents of Vatican II.

Today I will begin with a biblical observation: "The Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword."

These words from the Book of Hebrews are a source of revelation for us at every level. They tell us something significant about the Word of God, a topic that is considered dogmatically in the document of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*. *Dei Verbum*, the Word of God, has a double meaning in a Christian context. On the one hand, it refers to something very particular, the revelation received by the holy Church in sacred Scripture and Tradition. On the other hand, it refers to the Word made Flesh, the One who has dwelt among us, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

The Word of God, received through the ages in the formal transmission of revelation, is sharper than any two-edged sword, and so is the reality of the Divine Master whom we receive daily in the holy Eucharist and whose life we are called to be participants in, in an intimate way. The dogmatic constitution on Divine Revelation reveals to us the intimacy of the connection, the concomitancy, between the received Word and the living Word.

Our consideration of this intimacy must begin with an assertion. St. Paul tells us in the First Letter to Timothy, “God desires that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4). This is a dramatic assertion, particularly in a time in which the anthropology of religion informs us of the shrouded nature of deities among peoples of an earlier time.

Even Judaism maintained, in a very focused way, the distance of God, a God who was considered only within the context of the cloud, only known by an unspeakable name, the Tetragrammaton. The nature of our engagement with the Word of God in the new dispensation then comes with a movement, a desire on the part of God, a desire to be known and known intimately. God’s desire is that all things should be revealed and remain “in their entirety.”<sup>1</sup>

In His gracious goodness, God has seen to it that what He had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations. Therefore Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion (see Cor. 1:20; 3:13; 4:6), commissioned the Apostles to preach to all men that Gospel which is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching.<sup>2</sup>

God’s gracious revelation is therefore in a person, the person of Jesus, and our encounter with that person is transmitted through the evidence of the apostolic preaching. The content of this preaching, the Good News, the Gospel, was given first orally:

This commission was faithfully fulfilled by the Apostles who, by their oral preaching, by example, and by observances handed on what they had received from the lips of Christ, from living with Him, and from what He did, or

1. *Dei Verbum*, 7.

2. *Dei Verbum*, 7.



what they had learned through the prompting of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

This oral message came through the living witness of its postulators, a witness often sealed in the covenant of blood. The Word was believed because its harbingers were willing to die on its behalf. The oral message of the apostles existed for almost a generation when this same Word and its divine content were committed to writing.<sup>4</sup> From these earliest days of the Church, the Word went forth, not only in preaching and writing, but also in the celebration of the holy Eucharist, bringing men and women of the early Church into intimate contact with the Word about which they were hearing. Apostolic succession assured that:

[T]he apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by an unending succession of preachers until the end of time. Therefore the Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received, warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or by letter (2 Thess. 2:15), and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all (Jude 1:3). Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes toward the holiness of life and increase in faith of the peoples of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.<sup>5</sup>

The communication between Scripture and Tradition becomes an essential element in learning the way in which God intends to show Himself to us through history.

For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring,

3. *Dei Verbum*, 7.

4. *Dei Verbum*, 7.

5. *Dei Verbum*, 8.

in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.<sup>6</sup>

The living complement to Scripture and Tradition is the Magisterium, the teaching authority of the Church that gives authentic witness to the Word of God, and, in the context of that authentic witness, gives authentic interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

[And yet,] this teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously and explaining it faithfully in accord with a divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit, it draws from this one deposit of faith everything which it presents for belief as divinely revealed.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the document presents to us three distinct realities in the context of the Divine Plan: God intends to communicate to us, He uses the dual and interpenetrating means of Tradition and Scripture, and He provides for an authentic interpretation in the body of the Magisterium. What these dogmatic assertions teach us,

6. *Dei Verbum*, 9.

7. *Dei Verbum*, 10.

8. *Dei Verbum*, 10.

ultimately, is something, again, about God's love for us, his desire to draw us to Himself in a way that transcends the old covenant and its perceived intimacy. God intends to know us in a dynamic way, a way that involves us, that invites us through the means of Tradition and Scripture, in the living reality of the Magisterium of the Church.

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council found in *Dei Verbum* are not new teachings; they are teachings interpreted in a new way, revealing the dynamic nature of dogma seen in the teaching of the Council itself. The teachings of *Dei Verbum* offer a new perspective on our engagement with the particular modes of revelation considered in the document. They are not, however, exclusive. They represent a time of change in the Church.

A charge that has frequently been leveled at the Catholic Church is that, historically, it tried to keep the holy Word in the sacred Scriptures from the people. The claim, of course, is not only false, it is non-historical. It makes no sense to talk about access to the Bible in generations upon generations of people who could not read. Widespread illiteracy in the early Church, and the Medieval Church in particular, meant that most men and women were deprived of a direct experience of the Biblical texts.

Of course, because of the nature of textual production, there were no readily available texts for them to read anyway. It is wrong, however, to think that the early Church and the Medieval Church had no access to the Bible. The Bible was read in the liturgical assembly, and explained in preaching. The stories of the Bible were told in the living texts of architecture and stained glass. If the average man or woman could not read, then the essence of Scripture was conveyed to them by other means.

Christianity is not a religion of the Book; it is a religion of the living Word. If Catholics, historically, were not given access to the Book, they were given access to the living Word in the Holy Mass, in Communion, in the intimate encounters of a community built upon the Word. Reading the Bible becomes a much more important way of gaining access to the Word when there is not liturgical presence,

when the community of faith has been divided between the sacred and the secular.

It is true that, during the Renaissance and Reformation periods, the Church strictly curtailed access to the Bible for the average layman. This happened within a context, the context of the misinterpretation of the centrality of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) and the removal of the order of Christianity found in the liturgy. In other words, people during that time of Catholic prohibition were reading the Bible for the wrong reasons and in the wrong context. Never was the Catholic without access to the Word of God, understood in a particular way in the Mass.

If there was a tension between the body of Catholics reading the Scriptures and the prescriptions of the Magisterium, it came by way of false interpretive methodologies inherent in some Renaissance and Reformation views. One of these views is fundamentalism. Biblical fundamentalism sees the Bible rightly as inerrant. It sees it wrongly as self-sufficient. While we know that all of revelation is contained in the Bible, the Bible must stand in the living tradition of the Church. It must breathe through the lungs of the Church's authentic teaching office.

Various fundamentalist views hold that the Bible is self-interpreting, that its texts are self-evident. Yet, how many divisions within fundamentalism do we observe based on false readings of a self-evident text? Fundamentalism and its historical manifestations strip the Bible of its richness. As a divinely inspired text, the Bible is necessarily open to generative interpretation. Fundamentalism ultimately and ironically strips the Bible of its authority by making it the cognitive playground of useless speculators.

The opposite extreme of fundamentalism is liberalism. Liberal forms of Christianity seek to strip the Bible of its power by making it merely the written expression of an historical cultural environment. From this perspective, the Bible tells us a great deal about ancient religious practices, but nothing substantial about the world in which we live, the world we seek to interpret through its pages.

*Dei Verbum* stands at the end of a cautious trajectory of biblical

interpretation. In *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, Pope Pius XII's encyclical letter of 1943, the area of biblical scholarship is opened in the Church. The letter comes as a response to that written by Pope Leo XIII 50 years earlier, *Providentissimus Deus*. In the earlier letter, Pope Leo condemns many of the modernist interpretations of the Bible and generally holds fast to the Church's traditional stance, while nevertheless providing some means for Catholics gaining a greater access to biblical texts.

In the anniversary work, Pope Pius offers a more nuanced view, a view that comes in light of 50 crucial years in Catholic biblical scholarship. Pope Pius is open to new interpretive methodologies and new translations. He also promotes studying the text within its original linguistic context. He writes:

We ought to explain the original text which was written by the inspired author Himself and has more authority and greater weight than any, even the very best, translation whether ancient or modern. This can be done all the more easily and fruitfully if to the knowledge of languages be joined a real skill in literary criticism of the same text.<sup>9</sup>

All of this advancement led to the teaching found in *Dei Verbum*. The core of the teaching found in the document is the assertion that stands at the center of Catholic thought about the Bible: Christ is the center of the Scriptures. The Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are predicated on a single revelation, the Revelation of Christ Jesus. *Dei Verbum* offers this insight:

[T]he words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.<sup>10</sup>

The intimate link between Word and Word is reiterated. We come to know the Bible as Word precisely through our engagement with

9. *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, 16.

10. *Dei Verbum*, 13.

the Word, which is Christ. Here again, the Eucharistic celebration provides an essential link, the Word comes hard upon the Word in the celebration, unfolding as it does in every celebration the essence of the Divine Plan and the dogmatic assertion about both realities.<sup>11</sup> The Church finds nourishment in sacred Scripture, which it welcomes as the Word of God Himself.<sup>12</sup>

God is the author of all Scripture, and yet these writings are presented in the languages of human authors, again providing a replication of the fullness of time, in the Incarnation of the Son of God. The inspired books teach the Truth and thereby unveil the Truth broken and received on the altar. These books undoubtedly have a context, unveiled for us in authentic historical scholarship. However:

Holy Scripture must be read and interpreted in the sacred spirit in which it was written, no less serious attention must be given to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture if the meaning of the sacred texts is to be correctly worked out. The living tradition of the whole Church must be taken into account along with the harmony which exists between elements of the faith. It is the task of exegetes to work according to these rules toward a better understanding and explanation of the meaning of Sacred Scripture, so that through preparatory study the judgment of the Church may mature. For all of what has been said about the way of interpreting Scripture is subject finally to the judgment of the Church, which carries out the divine commission and ministry of guarding and interpreting the word of God.<sup>13</sup>

*Dei Verbum* unfolds three principles, presented first in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas for interpreting Scripture in

11. *Dei Verbum*, 21.

12. I Thessalonians, 2, 13.

13. *Dei Verbum*, 12.

accordance with the Spirit. These principles are essential to a Catholic reading of the Bible. The first is the principle of unity. All Scriptures speak of the same reality, the unity of the ultimate reality of God's plan. The center of that plan is Christ Himself. St. Thomas tells us that the Bible makes known the Heart of Christ.<sup>14</sup> In St. Thomas's estimation, the teachings of the Bible, here he is referring to the Old Testament, were obscured until the Passion of Christ provided a fundamental key to interpreting them.

Second, *Dei Verbum* reiterates the essential connection between Tradition and Scripture. Sacred Scripture is written in the heart of the Church, for the Church. It illuminates the Church and all attempts to understand it outside this concept lead to futile judgments of false meaning.

Finally, there is a need to be attentive to the analogy of faith, that is, the coherence of truths about the faith among themselves, interpreted not narrowly but with the whole plan of salvation.

The complexity of Scripture is also reiterated in *Dei Verbum's* canonization of the ancient model of the four senses of Scripture, that is, understanding all of Scripture in the literal, the spiritual, the tropological and the anagogical senses. *Dei Verbum* states:

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvelous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature." (11) For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.<sup>15</sup>

*Dei Verbum* goes on to look at the means by which the Church

14. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 112.

15. *Dei Verbum*, 13.

has interpreted the Old Testament and the New Testament. The teaching here is clear. All Scripture is Christ, and in Christ there is a unity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This kind of reading is called typology, a major interpretive theme in the Catholic schema of biblical exegesis.

Typology indicates the dynamic movement toward the fulfillment of the divine plan when “God [will] be everything to everyone.”<sup>16</sup> *Dei Verbum* draws to a close with the opening of a new and dynamic chapter in the Church’s relationship with the Bible.

And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting font of spiritual life. Hence “access to Sacred Scripture ought to be open wide to the Christian faithful.” “Therefore, the ‘study of the sacred page’ should be the very soul of sacred theology. The ministry of the Word, too – pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all forms of Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should hold pride of place – is healthily nourished and thrives in holiness through the Word of Scripture.” The Church “forcefully and specifically exhorts all the Christian faithful...to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ,’ by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. ‘Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.’”<sup>17</sup>

As a dogmatic constitution, *Dei Verbum* has opened for the Church a new chapter in its long relationship with sacred Scripture. While other documents of the Second Vatican Council have had a more prominent impact, perhaps *Dei Verbum* represents the greatest advancement in Church life in opening the pages of Sacred Writ for us in a new way.

Since Vatican II, we have had new and greater opportunities of

16. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 130.

17. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 131-133.



studying the Bible. We do so now in our parishes and religious communities in ways that would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. Our authentic study of the sacred Scripture has opened for us avenues of communication with other Christian groups. Today thousands of commentaries on the holy Scriptures are at our disposal, written at every level of understanding. Today we have access to the Bible in ways our ancestors in faith would have never predicted.

We are not, however, without some cautions still. We must still be wary of the need to read the Scriptures authentically, using the time-honored methods of the holy Church, employing various senses and seeing the Bible within the living Tradition of the Church. Within the Catholic Church, we must continually read the Bible in light of the teachings of the Magisterium, seeing in the body of bishops the authentic interpreters and teachers of the faith.

In the Catholic Church, we must remain cognizant of any attempt at proof-texting or reading the Scriptures in a reductive way, even when it suits laudable, apologetic purposes. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. It must remain so throughout our meanderings and musings, realizing at all times that its sole purpose is to bring us into contact, viable contact, with the living source of revelation itself, Jesus Christ, who is Lord of the world, now and forever.

# 10. Lumen Gentium - Rector's Conference for the Year of Faith, 2012

We are a people living in the middle of the Church. What does that mean? For many in our secularizing culture today, the Church and Church membership are, at best, peripheral ideals. Many people belong to a church community. Many Catholics are nominal members of our Church. Statistics tell us that there are more ex-Catholics than there are members of any other mainline denomination.

For many within the Catholic Church, approaching a document such as *Lumen Gentium* is an opportunity to find out additional information about the constituency of the Church to which they belong. They approach the document as anything else in life, to take it up or to put it down, or perhaps more insidiously to partly take it up and partly put it down, according to how well it fulfills their individual needs.

The approach is illegitimate. What we find in *Lumen Gentium* is nothing less than a ground plan for our existence. The Church is not merely a part of who we are. The Church is who we are. Our need is to be conformed to its principals, its ideals. *Lumen Gentium* defines the Church as a constitution; therefore it defines her followers in a constitutive way. What is the Church? Who are we? In today's world, these are critical questions.

The document begins with a thorough consideration of the mystery of the Church and the Church as mystery. It also begins with an important evangelical assertion, something that should be of primary interest to us in the age of the new evangelization.

This Sacred Synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature,

(1) to bring the light of Christ to all people, a light brightly visible on the countenance of the Church. (LG, 1)

The message of universality is a difficult one to swallow in our day. We live in a time in which universality is misunderstood. We live in an age in which personal appropriations of the truth are seen as normative. But the Council asserts that “eternal Father, by a free and hidden plan of His own wisdom and goodness, created the whole world,” and furthermore, “His plan was to raise us to a participation of the divine life” (LG, 2).

This is a mighty charge in our age. We have just experienced the turmoil of a national election. The outcome of this pivotal social and political event must be viewed as something essential to our lives. And yet, in the aftermath of the election, we (I truly believe) have to ask ourselves: what does the outcome of the election have to do with the divine plan? How does the recent election act to further the evangelical mission of the Church so that we may all be raised to a participation in the divine life?

Universality is compromised in light of local concerns. If you doubt it, read the blogs. Read the comments section of news stories. Do you find the message of the Gospel there? Or if it is found there, is it not soon reduced to ridicule by the Church’s free critics? Do we live in a Christian culture or a secular culture? Are we all trying to maintain allegiances to both when (at least at some level) they may prove contradictory?

One thing I do know from the teachings of the Council: “The mystery of the Holy Church is already brought to light in the manner of its foundation” (LG, 5). This is the centrality of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There can be no authentic life in the world that is not modeled on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Do we need to be apologetic about that assertion? I think not.

What does *Lumen Gentium* tell us?

The Church, “like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God” (14\*), announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes. (84) By the power of the risen

Lord it is given strength that it might, in patience and in love, overcome its sorrows and its challenges, both within itself and from without, and that it might reveal to the world, faithfully though darkly, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it will be manifested in full light. (LG, 8)

The split in the reality of individuals, particularly perhaps in this culture, is evident even here. We would like to say that we are immune to the cultural wars. We would like to assert that we are agents of change. To some extent, it may be true. But all of us, even the monks, are inundated in the cultural reality in which we are raised and formed. Even we find it difficult to understand those whose faith is seen as “too much” or as “too radical.” But I have a question: If the universality of the Church’s faith is ever to be truly realized, does it not demand a radical move from us?

When Jesus, who had suffered the death of the cross for mankind, had risen, He appeared as the one constituted as Lord, Christ and eternal Priest, (24) and He poured out on His disciples the Spirit promised by the Father. (25) From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King. (LG, 5)

Moving toward that completed Kingdom must begin somewhere. I say it must begin here. And yet the cult of particularity remains. It remains in our inability to turn over our wills to the will of the almighty Father. It remains in our stubbornness, our necessity of not uniting our minds and hearts, much less our bodies, to the universal Church, but rather continuing to live in the morass of relativism.

How can it be so when so great a gift as the Church’s history, mission and not to mention the very Body of Christ, has been entrusted to our care? If we expect to ever be effective evangelists

for the Kingdom, then we must fully examine ourselves and see what in our spiritual personalities needs to be retained and what needs to be sacrificed on the altar.

*Lumen Gentium*, in a way quite potent, asks us to consider this unity in the context of universalism and in the context of diversity. The constitution points to three images of the Church that give us insight into the way to this new universalism. The first is the sheepfold. The Church, we are told, is a flock. That also applies here. We look to the unity found in the True Shepherd, that is Jesus Christ, but we acknowledge the individualism of the sheep. And yet, under the guidance of the Shepherd, we are one flock, gathered into unity.

The Church is also seen as God's field. "That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly Gardener" (LG, 6). That field, although composed of unique trees, has a communal identity, a common understanding of itself because of the farmer.

Finally, the Church is called God's building. Made up of many stones, each stone uniquely placed and shaped, it is nevertheless a common edifice. We make up a common edifice.

This edifice has many names to describe it: the house of God (37) in which dwells His family; the household of God in the Spirit; (38) the dwelling place of God among men; (39) and, especially, the holy temple. This Temple, symbolized in places of worship built out of stone, is praised by the Holy Fathers and, not without reason, is compared in the liturgy to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (5\*). As living stones we here on earth are built into it. (40) John contemplates this holy city coming down from heaven at the renewal of the world as a bride made ready and adorned for her husband (LG, 6).

All of these images of the Church point to the same reality: We can be truly unique and, at the same time, *primarily* understood as part of a whole. We see that here, of course. One of the mainstays of our formation philosophy is the cultivation of each one here as a unique personality. Then, in that uniqueness, we seek the mortar

that makes us the common edifice; our individualism, then, is not the mark of our personhood, but our means of gaining access to the larger reality of the others.

In some houses of formation, there is a project to make each one into a representation of something ideal. In looking like some ideal of the priest, uniqueness is sacrificed. Here we seek to bond the uniqueness of each one with a common purpose of building the edifice, planting the field and gathering the flock. This seems to be the distinctive vision of the Church found in *Lumen Gentium*.

As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ. (56) Also, in the building up of Christ's Body various members and functions have their part to play. There is only one Spirit who, according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, gives His different gifts for the welfare of the Church. (57) (LG, 7).

In the Church, we also experience the fullness of the central mystery of Christianity, the mystery of the Incarnation. We find in the Church the curious admixture that stands at the crux of our ecclesial self-understanding. Just as Christ shared in humanity and divinity, so in his body the Church shares the same.

The Church is human and divine, as Christ is human and divine. Yet, unlike Christ, the Church shares an essential element of our humanity, *simul justus et peccator*, at the same time, justified and sinful. It becomes, then, the central image of the Church in Vatican II, a pilgrim Church, a Church on the way. The Church is already chosen by Christ; now we are called in the moment of having been chosen to live up to what we have received.

Already the final age of the world has come upon us (242) and the renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way; for the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells, (243) the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which

pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God. (244) (LG, 48)

*Lumen Gentium* begins with a rather bold assertion. Reversing the hierarchical initiatives of the usual modality of ecclesiology for the time, the document imposes a new model of Church at the onset. It is the image of the People of God. The document tells us:

Christ instituted this new covenant, the new testament, that is to say, in His Blood, (87) calling together a people made up of Jew and gentile, making them one, not according to the flesh but in the Spirit. This was to be the new People of God. (LG, 9)

What does this powerful image of the Church have to say about our life here? I think it says that we are called to realize, yet again, that this is not about me. We are called to suspend our judgments about how things are or should be in order to make ourselves available for the corporate, for the common good. We talk the talk of counter-culturalism, but if we wish to walk the walk, we might begin by realizing this ideal of the people of God.

It calls me to love my brothers, not superficially and not in name, but in the very faults that in the natural order make them unlovable.

Realizing the People of God calls me to realize the beauty, the profound beauty of brokenness, not only in the other but in myself. Our brokenness unites us to the reality of the crucified Lord, who engaged the brokenness of body and spirit to achieve the glory of the resurrection. While there is no virtue in being slumlords of our own debilitated real estate, there is no shame in recognizing my need to get better, and then getting better.

It calls me to accept in peace my sinfulness in the full knowledge of my reconciliation in Christ. Those who have never experienced the power of God's forgiveness can hardly expect to be effective proclaimers of that forgiveness in the sacrament.

It calls me to see in others, not what commonly places them in the forefront, but what, behind the scenes, they offer to humanity.

It calls me to realize that the good of the priesthood does not consist in dramatic and heroic acts, but in heroically supporting the ordinary, the daily, the commonplace. The priesthood, in this sense, calls me to find drama in the lives of shut-ins, to find excitement in the forgotten, to find meaning in what everything in the world asserts as meaningless. Then, I am a hero.

It calls me to sacrifice, really sacrifice, myself for the good of the whole. How can I do this in a world that insists on a scrupulous care for my own values, my own ideals, my own views, as the only thing that can be right?

I cannot truly offer myself in that way, that is in the way of Christ, until I turn my back on secularism, on an overindulgence of technology, on a unhealthy attention to my physical desires, on a destructive path that leads to the denigration, not of my body, but of the temple of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the true tabernacle.

The Church, indeed the whole world, is calling for us, pleading with us, to become involved in an eschatological drama. There is no room in this endeavor for half-heartedness, or preciousness, or guile. This is an intensely human pursuit, one that is critical for the future of humankind. And it is an intensely divine pursuit. That is, it is a pursuit for Christ who is the origin and center of all that we are.

In chapter three of *Lumen Gentium*, we find the fully counter-cultural assertion boldly laid out for us that: The Church is hierarchical. How can it be so in a fully egalitarian social order? The problem of this thought in American culture is we do not observe hierarchy. We do not believe that there are some who, by their office and not their personality, are called to serve through leadership. We do not believe that Christ, the eternal pastor, “willed that the bishops should be the shepherds of his Church until the end of the world.” (LG, 18)

Rather than offering willing obedience, we reserve judgment, waiting to see if a bishop will meet my criteria for success, and that criterion is, of course, agreeing with me. Could the holy apostles have passed that scrutiny? Could any pastor? Christ is the head. He speaks through the apostles, the bishops. The bishops, with



priests and deacons, take this ministry to the community, presiding in God's place over the flock of which they are the pastors, as teachers of doctrine, priests for sacred worship and ministers of government (LG, 20).

We are informed, in a radical way, that Christ Himself is present in the midst of believers in the person of the bishop, assisted by the priest (LG, 21). The documents of Vatican II explore the many varied relationships between bishops and priests and the clergy and the laity in many places. Three documents are given completely to the priesthood. The Second Vatican Council opened the way for a new understanding of the diaconate as more than a transitional ministry, but as a permanent vocation in the Church. Bishops, priests and deacons. These clerical distinctions are essential to understanding the nature of the Church.

*Lumen Gentium* also deals fully with the ideals of the priesthood in this context. "In virtue of their sacred ordination and of their common mission, all priests are united together in the bonds of intimate brotherhood." (LG, 28) This is a bold assertion, particularly in a time when so many presbyterates are fragmented by various ideological battles. I often state that when charity breaks down in ideological pursuits, then the pursuit is unworthy. Likewise in the priesthood.

*Lumen Gentium* tells us we are united as fathers in Christ. We become examples for the flock, and "we should preside over and serve the local community in such a way that we may deserve the name." (LG, 28) There is no ideological pursuit worth maintaining when charity is destroyed, particularly between those whom Christ has called to be examples of his charity to the world.

Because the human race today is joining more and more into a civic, economic and social unity, it is that much the more necessary that priests, by combined effort and aid, under the leadership of the bishops and the Supreme Pontiff, wipe out every kind of separateness, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of the family of God.

Unity must begin at home. And, I might add, it must begin here. If you are here to break down the bonds of communion in this community by the pursuit of esoteric ideological concerns, you have no place here. You have no place in Christ's priestly service if you are only a minister of division. *Lumen Gentium* goes on to explore how the Church is constituted, the role of clergy, and laity, the faithful, the role of married couples, the role of sanctification in the world.

*Lumen Gentium* calls all of us, no matter our place in the Church, for one thing and one thing only – witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to be witnesses to the Gospel, not as a sideline, not in good times, not in bad times. We are called to be witnesses to the Gospel at all times, with every fiber of our being, with every crumb of our subsistence, with every aspect of our talents.

We are called to represent Christ in a world, a secularizing world, that I believe is desperate, indeed is dying, to hear Good News. Brothers and sisters, we can only make sense of what we do here if we believe that. But if we believe that, if we believe that with every fiber of our being, then we are well on the way to transforming the entirety of creation.

We recently celebrated the Solemnity of All Saints. In my homily on that day, I said this:

And each day as we gather in prayer, as we pause in our rooms, as we catch our reflections in the mirrors, as we take a walk in these waning days filled with browning grass and burning leaves and gentle chills.

They walk with us.

They pray with us.

They sing songs with us.

They ask us to be with them.

This last line, I will repeat. They ask us to be with them in a common mission, a common purpose, a common *telos*. Brothers and sisters, this is the Church we engage. This is the only vocation to which we can truly aspire. *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* ends with a consideration of Our Lady. She is extolled as mother of the Church and rightly so.

Just as the Mother of Jesus, glorified in body and soul in heaven, is the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come, so too does she shine forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, (304) as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth. (LG, 68)

Our Lady, the mother of the Church, teaches us everything we need to know. Obey God. Follow his plan. Leave no room for your own map of the universe. Aim patiently, but firmly, toward the eternal city of God, the new Jerusalem.

She is first among us but always one of us.

She leads the way.

We follow her path.

Some will insist that there is an aspect of this talk that is roundabout, that is contradictory, that is convoluted. Welcome to the wildness of the Church. It is a wildness brought about in the source of her life, the Incarnation, an ideal balancing on the edge of a sharp ideological knife.

There is a wildness in the Church.

A wildness that rushes in upon our classes and our conferences, our ministries, our time of study and recreation.

A wildness that invades our bones like the thrill of a quickening autumn wind.

This same wildness calls its ministers to a kind of wildness. It is not the wildness of normlessness, but the wildness of possibility, of constantly realizing that there is more here than meets the eye. It is the wildness of mystery and the openness to mystery. If we are not open to possibility, to mystery, to unfolding, then we have already created the space in life, the narrow space, for an observance of faith that borders on idolatry.

If we wish to live idolatrous lives, please walk away. If you can sustain in your hearts the adventure of faith so desperately needed in our world, you have arrived. Let us begin. In that sense we, as Church, can truly be the light of the nations.