



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY

OFFICE OF THE RECTOR

10701 South Military Trail ~ Boynton Beach, Florida 33436-4899

Tel: 561.732.4424 ~ Fax: 561.737.2205

RECTOR'S CONFERENCE

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“Service vs. Being Served: Jekyll and Hyde”

Begin with a profound affirmation for a great year!

I want to begin tonight with the image of a book written by Robert Louis Stephenson in 1886 *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. According to [Wikipedia](#): “The work is commonly associated with the rare mental condition often called ‘split personality’, referred to in psychiatry as dissociative identity disorder, where within the same body there exists more than one distinct personality. In this case, there are two personalities within Dr. Jekyll, one apparently good and the other evil. The novella's impact is such that it has become a part of the language, with the very phrase ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ coming to mean a person who is vastly different in moral character from one situation to the next.” Jekyll and Hyde are who we want to avoid becoming in our pastoral ministry - especially in our transition from the seminary to ordination.

In other words, to go through formation and act one way for the sake of the Formation Team and then act in a contrary way once ordained because no one can tell me what to do – this is clericalism at its worst. This is what Pope Francis is referring to when he warned seminary formators about not creating “Little Monsters.” So tonight I am going to present a few vignettes, painting in broad strokes, even caricatures in order to make the point. Dr. Jekyll was a well respected and mild mannered gentleman, but after taking a potion he was transformed into a dangerous monster that hurt others, and we certainly do not want to have such a “split personality” in our own lives

So let's talk about the dutiful and diligent hardworking seminarian who becomes a seeming lackluster and lazy priest who shows no initiative. I hear pastors say to me that their associate does what is mandatory (i.e. shows up for Mass) but he doesn't know how to engage the parish family – thus what does it mean to show up to activities that are not mandatory? A walk through the school, visiting CCD children, a little time at coffee and donuts, basketball or volleyball game (e.g. one sporting event per season and the parishioners will think you are at everything), being in the office during office hours even when you don't have scheduled appointments; visiting various meetings of the Knights of Columbus, the RCIA, the Womens' Guild, and various organizations even if ever so brief. I wonder sometimes if we don't set you up for this confusion in the seminary when we make the distinction of mandatory and optional – which translates I don't have to show up. Learn as a priest/as a father to show up. Yes it takes time, but it also brings joy. The “good weariness” and “fruitful and joyful exhaustion” that Pope Francis spoke of on Holy Thursday:

This weariness in the midst of activity is a grace on which all priests can draw (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 279). And how beautiful it is! People love their priests, they want

and need their shepherds! The faithful never leave us without something to do, unless we hide in our offices or go out in our cars wearing sun glasses. There is a good and healthy tiredness. It is the exhaustion of the priest who wears the smell of the sheep... but also smiles the smile of a father rejoicing in his children or grandchildren. It has nothing to do with those who wear expensive cologne and who look at others from afar and from above (cf. *ibid.*, 97). We are the friends of the Bridegroom: this is our joy. If Jesus is shepherding the flock in our midst, we cannot be shepherds who are glum, plaintive or, even worse, bored. The smell of the sheep and the smile of a father.... Weary, yes, but with the joy of those who hear the Lord saying: “Come, O blessed of my Father” (Mt 25:34) (Homily at the Chrism Mass 2 April 2015).

Or how about that same dutiful and diligent hardworking seminarian who *seemingly* becomes lackluster and lazy because he is busy always protecting himself. I hear pastors tell me, don't send me a Carthusian, send me a servant. We live in a very regimented and structured environment here in the seminary and so there is a proper time for everything – in the parish, there is a proper time for nothing – what do I mean by that? In the seminary you always know when you are going to pray your Office, pray your Holy Hour, have Mass, eat your meals, make time for exercise and spend time in fraternity. In the parish, flexibility must become your middle name! One sick call to the hospital, one family crisis that shows up in the office, one angry parent who walks over from the school can shoot your whole schedule. Or do we say, I'm sorry that is Father's nap time (which by the way, naps cannot be your norm!), or exercise time, or prayer time, or even day off. Learn to be flexible – make adjustments on the fly and die to self in that moment – not easy, but this is what a father does for his children. Ask parents how they do it (even the bad ones), they must sacrifice their own desires and comforts for the good of their children. That being said, I deeply want you to be men of prayer – daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours, silent time in intimacy with the Lord – but know that it might be at a different time each day or you may need to make midstream adjustments, or even pray late at night to catch up (I can't tell you how many times I have had late night Holy Hours and Hours of the Office a little behind the *veritas horarum*). Similarly, your health is very important to me and to the Church, but if something in our schedule has to give, it is our daily exercise – how I would love to be able to do something physical everyday but it is not realistic. If I can get 3 or 4 days a week for 30-45 minutes I am doing great. You will not have time to go to LA Fitness for an hour and a half everyday as a priest – realize this now and adjust your expectations. Your work week will be 60-80 hours. This is not a 40 hour job – it is our vocation. While our friends work from 9-5, our work is a little more all encompassing because this is also our family. Our friends work eight hours and then run carpool and soccer practice and housecleaning and cooking. We don't have to take kids to soccer, but sometimes we need to take a walk out to the sports field and see “our” children play (and beat St. Lawrence!). If you think of priesthood as work, the 80 hour week will exhaust you. Remember, I am counting prayer and liturgy as part of our “work day” – this is who we are, don't freak out. I recently heard from an old man the cliché: “Do what you love and you will never work a day in your life!” If we realize it is our life then we can find the joy as Pope Francis mentioned at the Chrism Mass. We are not always going to love every moment of every day, but Jesus Christ gives the meaning to all we do, and “where there is love, sacrifice is easy.”

Another vignette for you is the simple seminarian who exists on very little money who becomes the worldly extravagant priest who not only liberally spends his own money, but also that of the parish. Talk about a change of gears when you are ordained. You go from having absolutely zero money to being given \$30,000, of which practically all is disposable income. How easy it is to

allow our spending to get out of control – buying clothes (both secular and clerical), the latest gizmos and gadgets, a constant wave of mail order catalogue boxes showing up at the rectory, overspending on the parish credit card or submitting every receipt as though we are owed everything. People often want to give us money for our services and my response is, “that is what I get paid for – I actually *do* get a salary as a priest.” The truth is that we really don’t need more of anything. They will often give it anyway, and so be generous in giving it back – tithing abundantly to various organizations including your own parish and alma mater! As the great Msgr. Gerry Finnegan of Venice would say, “never, ever, ever accept money at a sick call.” This is just what we do. We may get a gift at a wedding or baptism other than the parish offering, but *never* when we have gone to a house or hospital to anoint someone – I always say, just put it in the poor box next time you are at church. Remember Canon 282:

§1 Clerics are to follow a simple way of life and avoid anything which smacks of worldliness.

§2 Goods which they receive on the occasion of the exercise of an ecclesiastical office, and which are over and above what is necessary for their worthy upkeep and the fulfillment of all the duties of their state, they may well wish to use for the good of the Church and for charitable works.

Let me paint another picture of the middle of the road, very healthy seminarian who leaves the seminary only to become the arch-conservative liturgical throwback to the 16th century. Who are you? How were you formed? Why did I never see this? Where did you come from? And most importantly is this what the people of God need you to be? I must admit from the time to time I get blown away by this one – priests who act like they know better than their bishops, pastors, certainly the seminary in which they were trained and they come out guns blazing to change how their parish does just about everything. OK, I get the zeal, but not the imprudence and arrogance. Listen, learn, and grow into a member of the new family you are being sent to. *Please* worry more about the Latinos than your Latin!

Or how about the docile obedient seminarian who after 10 years of ordination refuses to move when asked by the bishop. Really? Which part of this did he not realize that this is exactly what obedience entails – to serve the greatest need of our diocese as discerned by our bishop even when it is inconvenient.

Or the submarine seminarian who says all of the right things regarding celibacy to the Formation Team only to find himself in trouble from acting out later in parish ministry with a needy divorcee, a handsome young woman *or* man, a wealthy widow, or absolutely God forbid a minor! Brothers, the grass is always greener (follow up from February’s conference on celibacy). And this area is where we usually “weary ourselves” (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 277) as Pope Francis lamented at the Chrism Mass:

But this third kind of weariness is more “self-referential”: it is dissatisfaction with oneself, but not the dissatisfaction of someone who directly confronts himself and serenely acknowledges his sinfulness and his need for God’s mercy, his help; such people ask for help and then move forward. Here we are speaking of a weariness associated with “wanting yet not wanting”, having given up everything but continuing to yearn for the fleshpots of Egypt, toying with the illusion of being something different. I like to call this kind of weariness “flirting with spiritual worldliness” (ibid.).

When we straddle the fence and flirt with spiritual worldliness, especially in reference to celibacy, we exhaust ourselves! Pope Francis just published the [Message for the World Day of Prayer for Vocations](#) in which he reminds us:

Jesus says: “Everyone who has left home or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.” All of this is profoundly rooted in love. The Christian vocation is first and foremost a call to love, a love which attracts us and draws us out of ourselves, “de-centering” us and triggering “an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God.

I am always drawn back to Luke 9:62 - “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” And remember the great line that I have previously shared from Msgr. Preston Moss from Nassau – “Keep your hands to the plow, even when they are bleeding!”

And now to the really mundane and immature: the seminarian who cleans his room before inspection and never integrates the good stewardship behind it only to be black-balled by the priests of his diocese who do not want that slob in their rectories.

Or one more, the eager beaver who is very conscientious with his work, but who also says yes to everything outside of the parish. Someone once told their pastor, but Msgr. Toups does this, LOL! I just want to make clear that what the rector of a major seminary has to do is very different than an associate pastor – I leave for a meeting or a talk and there are ten other priests on campus. You leave the parish and there is maybe one left holding the bag and building up resentments toward you. Don’t get me wrong, there is a time and place to appropriately get involved outside the parish for the occasional youth retreat or college campus talk, but only in dialogue with your pastor and never at the detriment of your primary community. Always be faithful to being present to your parish first.

Now is the time to learn how to be a parish priest. To learn how to prioritize and distinguish the greater good at any given time, to distinguish the difference between unstructured time and free time. In other words, if you only have the Sunday 8:00 a.m. Mass – you are not free the rest of the day to tailgate at the Jags game (except on *very* rare occasions). We must all learn to be personally responsible for the parish in which we serve – *You* will be the administration, not Keith, Fr. Remek, and Msgr. Toups; take initiative when you see a problem: when the school alarm goes off in the middle of night – it is your problem. Act the same now, this is your home, this is your parish – if you see something that needs to be fixed, fix it; if you hear an alarm going off, report it. Don’t be afraid of work, laying down your life, and sacrificing for your family – “model your life on the mystery of the Lord’s cross.”

Ultimately poor Dr. Jekyll longs to be free of the nagging Mr. Hyde who continues to drain him and drag him down. Don’t be your own worst enemy! Be free and find points of integration all throughout your seminary career. *Understand* what you do, *imitate* what you celebrate, and *conform* your life to the mystery of the Lord’s cross.”

Pope Saint John Paul the Great wrote:

[It] is vital to educate priests to have the virtues of asceticism and interior discipline, a spirit of sacrifice and self-denial, the acceptance of hard work and of the cross. These are

elements of the spiritual life of the priests who are to put into practice the “radical self-giving” proper to their vocation, following the example of Christ, who said: “I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do” (John 17:4).” (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 28)

And as Pope Francis concluded his Chrism Mass Homily, so do I tonight:

Our discipleship itself is cleansed by Jesus, so that we can rightly feel “joyful”, “fulfilled”, “free of fear and guilt”, and impelled to go out “even to the ends of the earth, to every periphery”. In this way we can bring the good news to the most abandoned, knowing that “he is with us always, even to the end of the world”. And please, let us ask for the grace to learn how to be weary, but weary in the best of ways! (2 April 2015).

Questions and Dialogue - what does an 8 hour work day look like?