



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

20 NOVEMBER 2014

“Munus Sanctificandi: Becoming and Making Saints”

Today begins a three-part series on the threefold office of Christ and consequently the priest. By virtue of the sacramental character imparted at ordination, the priestly authority of Christ is given to the ordained to sanctify, teach, and govern. This threefold office or *triplex munus* finds its origin in the ministry of Christ who is *the* Priest, Prophet, and King, or as Bishop Lessard likes to remember it with three P's: Priest, Prophet, and Pastor. The Second Vatican Council used this threefold typology for understanding episcopal, presbyteral, and diaconal ministry as well as the ministry of all of the baptized (*Lumen Gentium* 10-13, 20-21, 25-31, 34-36).

From the moment of ordination, priests share in the *tria munera* of Christ in order to sanctify through the sacraments (*munus sanctificandi*), teach and preach (*munus docendi* or *propheticum*), and govern or pastor (*munus regendi*) the people of God (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2-6). Today we're going to focus on the sanctifying office or function of the priest, the *munus sanctificandi* (PO 5). The priest has been sealed and ontologically changed through ordination for a specific purpose: so that he can make Christ sacramentally present to the faithful. The priest has been deputed to act (*deputatio*) and sent on mission (*missio*) by Christ: “Do this in memory of me” (cf. Lk. 22:19). When the priest speaks the words of the institution narrative, he switches to the first person, “this is my body ... this is my blood.” It is Jesus Christ who is speaking, the priest has been consecrated in order to consecrate. Through ordination, the priest receives this ontological change not as a badge of honor but as a radical commitment to make Christ present for the world. He stands *in persona Christi capitis* as *his* form of discipleship and service to the Church (cf. PO 2).

The sacramental character received in priestly ordination gives all of us great confidence in the objectivity of the sacraments, namely that if a validly ordained Catholic priest offers Mass, Christ is showing up. Thus the validity of the sacraments is not based on the worthiness of the minister. However, priests do have a grave responsibility to focus on their own personal sanctity to which the faithful have a right. Even though the sacraments are objectively valid, the priest has a subjective responsibility to be holy. The sanctifying office of which we speak of tonight is also intended to be *our* sanctification. Our vocation, and our faithful fulfillment thereof, is intended to be our path to salvation. As St. Paul wrote: “I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27). And elsewhere he urges us “to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received” (Eph. 4:1).

Priests sanctify through the sacraments (cf. canon 528 §2 and 530).

Paragraph five of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* sums up the sanctifying office of the priest in the celebration of the sacraments as follows:

By Baptism priests introduce men into the People of God; by the sacrament of Penance they reconcile sinners with God and the Church; by the Anointing of the Sick they relieve those who are ill; and especially by the celebration of Mass they offer Christ's sacrifice sacramentally. But in the celebration of all the sacraments – as St. Ignatius Martyr already asserted in the early Church – priests are hierarchically united with the Bishop in various ways and so make him present in a certain sense in individual assemblies of the faithful.

But the other sacraments and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate are bound up with the Eucharist and are directed towards it (*PO 5*).

As we exercise the priestly office of sanctifying, we can never consider ourselves lone rangers, for in fact we are united to the office of the bishop from whose ministry our own flows; we are united with the presbyterate with whom we share a common mission; and we are united with the faithful whose humble servants we have become.

While the sanctifying office certainly relates to all of the sacraments, it is most particularly directed towards the Eucharist as the Council stated above. We are ordained to offer sacrifice, that is the very definition of the priesthood. The faithful offer the sacrifice of their lives in the common priesthood (Rms. 12:1), and the priest offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass through the ministerial priesthood (thus the difference not only in degree, but in essence that the fathers of the Second Vatican Council emphasized in *Lumen Gentium*, 10). Christ is *the* Priest - we share in His priesthood. Through the power of the Holy Spirit working through us as His instruments, we re-present Christ to the world through our sacramental ministry. In fact, when most people think of priests the number one thing they think of is that we offer Mass! While this is certainly not the only thing we do, it is the most visible and spiritually powerful act entrusted to our care. After all we are frequently reminded that it is the source and summit of our faith! Do we allow our lives to revolve around this central act of our day? A danger for us “professional religious” is that the Mass can become mundane and the beautiful Ritual can become rote.

Recognizing that the offering of the Sunday Eucharist for the people of God is *the* moment of encounter with God and *the* encounter with us as their servants, it is so important for us to plan, prepare, and be present. The Eucharist is valid *ex opere operato*, but our participation in the mystery sure makes a big difference for the experience of the faithful. Think back and imagine for a moment a great liturgical experience: what put you in touch with the heavenly liturgy at that earthly moment? [pause] Now think back to a moment where the heavenly liturgy never entered your mind because you felt like you were in purgatory during Mass? In both cases, did the celebrant play a role in that experience to help you or hinder you ... was he a bridge or an obstacle? Each of us will play this role and at times we will truly help others, and at other times in our weaknesses and fragility we will be a barrier. Let's pray that we are bridges more often than not.

In order to be the bridge and faithfully fulfill the *munus sanctificandi* we must Plan, Prepare, and be Present:

Plan: Liturgies are to be well planned. The priest, as part of a parish team, works together with the pastor (the captain of the team), the sacristans, servers, deacons, greeters, ushers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the liturgical environment committee, and in a particular way with the pastoral musicians of the parish (January formation conference). Great liturgy doesn't just happen; it comes together by everyone in the Body of Christ doing their part.

Granted the priest's role is the *sine qua non* of the celebration, but without the efforts of the whole parish team so much would be missing in the Sunday experience for our parishioners. The priest is the servant of all, and so in our collaboration with our teams, we do not "lord it over them" (Mt. 20:25), but serve them in humility. Along those lines, Pope Francis said just last week that: "In fact, a Pastor who is conscious that his ministry flows only from the mercy and heart of God will never be able to assume an authoritarian attitude, as if everyone was at his feet and the community was his property, his personal kingdom" (General Audience, 12 November 2014).

Prepare: Your remote preparation begins now in the seminary. Learning the rubrics and flow of the Mass, the liturgical gestures and movements, serving and reading at Mass, and the liturgical and preaching *practica* that you are doing now affect the way in which you will celebrate in the future. Our theme of the year, the words that I pray each of you will hear one day at ordination remind us of the necessary preparation: "*Understand* what you do, *imitate* what you celebrate, and *conform* your life to the mystery of the Lord's cross." The remote preparation has to do with making the connections here in the seminary with the life that you will one day live as a priest. Understand what you do *now* and why you do it; imitate the oblation of Christ *now* through your daily living in loving obedience to the community in which you have been called; and conform your life *now* through a prayer life capable of transforming you and pastoral labor capable of transforming others both within and outside of these gates. Cardinal Dolan regularly says, "so the seminarian so the priest." If you are waiting for transformation to happen after ordination, it is too late - it must happen now if you are to live in the image of Jesus Christ High Priest and Servant of all.

Our proximate preparation begins with the Monday focus on the next weekend at hand, a practice that is good to begin even now - we will talk more about this next month regarding the *munus docendi*; the importance of preaching and teaching well.

The immediate preparation happens the day of the celebration, and in the sacristy, and during the celebration. Is the priest conscious of exercising the sacred functions entrusted to him by the Lord Himself? If the priest "prays" the Liturgy all the more so does the congregation. I am convinced that the liturgical renewal that so many call for from various quarters in the Church will come about not through making changes to the Rite, but by making changes in our hearts. If we celebrate, or serve, or proclaim in a seemingly lackadaisical or sloppy manner, then very often the people will follow our lead. Rather we are to strive to see what we do in the sanctuary as the singularly most important moment of our day and allow our lives to reflect that in fact this is the "source and summit" of our faith.

Be Present: Being present to the Lord and to the faithful in the liturgy makes all the difference in the experience of the celebration. But in addition, your presence around the parish on Sundays, when 97% of the people of the parish see you (or don't see you), is extremely impactful. To greet before and after every Mass makes you someone very real and shows that you care for them as a father does for his family. Trust me there will be bad days when we are just not capable of this physically or psychologically, but what is our general attitude to being present to our family - is it a burden or a blessing? In addition, it is also a beautiful and laudable practice to assist with Holy Communion at the Masses you are not scheduled to celebrate (you may have to wait until you are a pastor to implement this one!). On Sunday, and at times on weekdays, you will be offering more than one Mass - do not be afraid of this pastoral reality. This is our sacred office and the unique gift that we offer to the faithful who come to us to be fed. Now let me say this, it takes a lot out of us to spend ourselves in this way, since it is certainly easier to only show up at

our “scheduled Masses” and stay in our rooms and watch the morning talk shows followed by football games, but is this the kind of priest we want to be? Allow yourself to be consumed by the faithful as Christ is consumed on the Altar - this is *our* self oblation and the sacrifice we offer for our family when we are needed - the ministry of presence cannot be underestimated at coffee and donuts, religious education, parish gatherings, and especially at our Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist.

After all, isn't the whole purpose of doing what we do meant to draw the parish (or the seminary community) into a deeper encounter with Christ and to inspire greatness within them? The sanctifying office which the priest fulfills, despite his own imperfections and weaknesses, is about making saints! Is this our daily objective?

I want to close with a letter from Pope Francis to the Italian Episcopal Conference delivered last week:

Holy priests are sinners who have been forgiven, and instruments of forgiveness. Their existence speaks the language of patience and perseverance; they are not tourists of the spirit, eternally undecided and unsatisfied, as they know that they are in the hands of He Who never fails in His promises, and whose Providence ensures that nothing can ever separate them from their belonging. ... Yes, it is still the time for priests of this substance, ‘bridges’ enabling the encounter between God and the world.

Priests like this cannot be improvised: they are forged through the valuable formative work of the Seminary, and Ordination consecrates them forever as men of God and servants of His people. [However,] the identity of the presbyter, precisely as it comes from above, demands he follow a daily itinerary of reappropriation, starting from that which made of him a minister of Jesus Christ. ... The formation of which we speak is without end, as priests never cease to be disciples of Jesus and to follow Him. Therefore, formation as discipleship accompanies the ordained minister throughout his life. Initial and continuing formation are two parts of a single entity: the path of the presbyter disciple, enamored of his Lord and constantly following him.

You are aware that there is no need for clerical priests whose behavior risks distancing people from the Lord, or functionary priests who, while they fulfill their role, seek their consolation far from Him. Only those who keep a steady gaze on what is truly essential may renew their acceptance of the gift they have received. ... Only those who allow themselves to conform to the Good Shepherd find unity, peace and strength in the obedience of service; only those who take their breath in presbyteral fraternity leave behind the falsehood of a conscience that claims to be the epicenter of everything, the sole measure of their feelings and actions” (11 November 2014).

May each of us be such priests who focus on serving Christ in our daily lives and leading the flock closer to Him through the sanctifying office entrusted to us.