

“THE HEART OF THE PRIEST”
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Introduction

I am very pleased to be with you here at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. I wish to thank Father Thomas Knoebel for inviting me to give this Fall Dehon Lecture in Hales Corners here in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. I also thank the Board of Trustees, Seminary Faculty, and Staff for their important work in the continuing formation of ministers of the Church. Certainly, this venerable institution is responsible for nurturing and guiding for many years those who aspired and aspire to the priesthood, as well as for forming deacons and lay ecclesial ministers.

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the Holy Father’s personal representative in this country, I wish to assure you of his spiritual closeness and affection for each of you.

We know that the recent Popes have spoken of the need for a New Evangelization. This requires a profound reconsideration of how we communicate the Christian experience; this is the core of the new missionary spirit that must take hold of the Church. To that end and to fulfill the desire of the Holy Father that each episcopal conference reflect on the best way to implement *Evangelii Gaudium* in its own country, the American bishops organized a conference, which was held in Orlando at the beginning of July.

Central to this theme of Evangelization is a lived-faith that must be learned and deepened constantly amid a changing landscape, marked not only by a change in demographics but also by a noticeable increase in the number of baptized Catholics, especially those under age thirty, who identify as having no religion. The need for this missionary spirit is becoming more urgent as challenges in transmitting the faith grow in an increasingly secularized world.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis invites “the Christian faithful to embark upon a new chapter of evangelization”, marked by the “joy of the Gospel.” (CF. POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 1)

Today, the Church needs joyful, missionary disciples – heralds of the Good News, formed after the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This was also the desire of the Venerable Leo John Dehon, the founder of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. It might seem strange to think of priests as disciples rather than as leaders, but the new *Ratio Fundamentalis*, issued in December 2016, emphasizes just that: It is particularly necessary for the priests today to understand themselves as missionary disciples.

The *Ratio Fundamentalis* is a document written to help those engaged in priestly formation meet the demands of this new era – an era of which Pope Francis has said, “Today we are not living in an age of change so much as a change of age.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS AT THE MEETING WITH PARTICIPANTS IN THE FIFTH CONVENTION OF THE ITALIAN CHURCH,” FIRENZE, 10 NOVEMBER 2015).

Today, I would like to outline the main elements of the *Ratio Fundamentalis* which provide us with an image of the priest capable of meeting the challenges of our day. After developing this priestly profile, I will examine the homilies of Pope Francis on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart

of Jesus which deepen the profile. Finally, I will offer the example of an Italian priest, whose tomb was recently visited by Pope Francis, who illustrates how the priesthood can be lived, with a heart formed by the love of the Heart of Jesus, in a way adapted to the pastoral needs of our day.

The New Ratio Fundamentalis

On December 8, 2016, the Congregation for the Clergy issued a new *Ratio Fundamentalis*, entitled, “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation.” In 1970, following the Second Vatican Council, a *Ratio Fundamentalis* was published; this was later updated in 1985, following the promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law. Subsequently, the Pontificates of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI made significant contributions to the understanding of the approach to Priestly Formation.

In *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, Saint John Paul II offered an *integrated* vision of the dimensions of priestly formation: the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. With his Apostolic Letter *Ministorum Institutio*, Benedict XVI highlighted how seminary formation naturally continues in the priesthood through ongoing formation. As such, the Office of Seminaries was transferred to the Congregation for Clergy, which began preparing the new *Ratio Fundamentalis* in 2014, in response to Pope Francis.

In speaking of priestly vocations, the Holy Father noted that “They are uncut diamonds, to be formed both patiently and carefully, respecting the conscience of the individual, so that they may shine among the People of God.” (POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO THE PLENARY OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, 3 OCTOBER 2014)

What should these “uncut diamonds” look like? The new *Ratio* says:

“The fundamental idea is that Seminaries should form missionary disciples who are ‘in love’ with the Master, shepherds ‘with the smell of the sheep’, who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence, every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a continuous configuration to Christ.” (CONGREGATION FOR CLERGY, “THE GIFT OF THE PRIESTLY VOCATION,” 8 DECEMBER 2016, INTRODUCTION, 3).

The model of formation proposed in the new *Ratio Fundamentalis* presupposes the integration of the four dimensions of formation offered in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. This integrated formation prepares the seminarian and priest to make a gift of himself to the Church – to go out of himself, to not be self-referential but to look to the essential needs of the flock. Indeed, the Holy Father wishes priests not to be managers or mere functionaries of the sacred, but rather to be priests with inclusive and compassionate hearts, who show forth the tenderness of God.

A recent joint letter from the Congregation for Clergy and the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life states:

“To form priests with this profile – as the Holy Father often has recommended – it is necessary that the initial formation ensure a balanced human maturity, a solid spirituality, and an attentive vigilance toward that worldly spirit which would be fatal for a fruitful exercise of the ministry. This worldly spirit is expressed, for example, under the form of vainglory, of the search for money and power or in legalistic rigidity.” (JOINT LETTER OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY AND THE CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND THE SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, 13 MAY 2017)

The *Ratio* sees this formation taking place in stages: the propaedeutic stage; the discipleship stage; the configuration stage; and the “pastoral stage” or “stage of vocational synthesis.”

The propaedeutic or preparatory stage is necessary in an increasing secularized world, in an era in which the transmission of the Faith has been difficult or uneven, and in an era marked by the reconfiguration of the family and clear cultural shifts which are not always supportive of the priestly vocation. The propaedeutic period is to provide a solid foundation for the spiritual life, familiarizing seminarians with the different forms of prayer within the Church and educating them in the fundamentals of the faith.

The discipleship stage corresponds to the period of philosophical studies in a college seminary or pre-theology program. Here the emphasis is on increasing one’s awareness of being a disciple, who “is the one whom the Lord has called to ‘stay with Him’, to follow Him, and to become a missionary of the Gospel.” (cf. *Ratio Fundamentalis*, 61). In the discipleship stage, the seminarian is rooted in the *sequela Christi* – the following of Christ. Authentic human formation at this stage is essential, as grace will build upon nature and perfect it. Character formation, which involves “sincerity of mind, a constant concern for justice, fidelity to one’s promises, refinement in manners, modesty in speech coupled with charity”, should be a focus of formation programs.

The seminarian gradually journeys toward an inner freedom and maturity permitting him to begin the configuration stage, which corresponds to the period of theological studies and concentrates on the “configuration of the seminarian to Christ, Shepherd and Servant, so that, united to Him, he can make his life a gift of self to others.” (cf. *Ratio*, 68)

During this period of formation, the sentiments and attitudes of Christ should arise within the seminarian both in his relationship with God and in his relationship to the People of God who will be entrusted to his care. The configuration stage demands commitment to the life of the Good Shepherd in one’s willingness to give one’s life for his flock and to seek out the lost sheep.

This Pastoral Stage includes immediate preparation for diaconate and priesthood. Pastoral activity helps the candidate to discover that place of interior freedom from which he can freely, consciously, and definitively state his intention and desire for priesthood of Jesus Christ, whose heart burned with pastoral charity.

The Heart of Christ and the Heart of the Priest

Having described the stages of formation in the *Ratio*, we can now ask: What does it mean to have a priestly heart, configured to the heart of Christ? The homilies offered by the Holy Father on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in each year of his Pontificate are instructive in answering this question.

The 2013 homily of Pope Francis, given at Domus Sanctae Martae, focused on two dimensions of love. First, love is expressed more clearly in actions than in words, and second, there is greater love in giving than receiving. God expresses his love by being close to his people, and the image of the shepherd who knows each member of the flock by name, conveys this *closeness*, but along with this closeness comes *tenderness*. The challenge, especially for the priest is to allow ourselves to be loved by God. It is what the Holy Father calls a “difficult” science, the difficult habit of letting myself be loved” by God. (HOMILY, SOLEMNITY OF THE SACRED HEART, JUNE 8, 2013).

The closeness of the priest as shepherd who accompanies the people is a consistent mantra of Pope Francis. The Pope stated:

“I repeat it often: walking with our people, sometimes in front, sometimes in the middle, and sometimes behind: in front in order to guide the community, in the middle in order to encourage and support; and at the back in order to keep it united and so that no one lags too far behind, to keep them united.” (MEETING WITH CLERGY, CONSECRATED PEOPLE, AND MEMBERS OF DIOCESAN PASTORAL COUNCILS, CATHEDRAL OF SAN RUFFINO, ASSISI, 4 OCTOBER 2013)

In the text of his 2014 homily, Pope Francis emphasizes the need to have a *steadfast and humble* heart. Here he focused on the steadfastness of God’s love and fidelity. God was not afraid to bind Himself to humanity; the steadfastness of God’s love finds its fulfillment in Jesus, who remains faithful, showing forth the face of the Merciful Father. The Holy Father wrote:

“God’s steadfast love for his people is manifest and wholly fulfilled in *Jesus Christ*, who, in order to honor God’s bond with his people, he made himself our slave, stripped himself of his glory and assumed the form of a servant. Out of love he did not surrender to our ingratitude, not even in the face of rejection. ... Jesus remains faithful, he never betrays us: even when we were wrong, He always waits for us to forgive us: He is the face of the merciful Father.” (HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER, READ BY CARDINAL ANGELO SCOLA, 27 JUNE 2014)

The steadfastness of his love shows the humility of His Heart. He came to offer love with gentleness and humility, which in turn, allows the priest to be a witness to his love in humble, gentle service. The Holy Father continued:

“And the significance of the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is ... (that) God’s faithfulness teaches us to accept life as a circumstance of his love and he allows us to witness this love to our brothers and sisters in *humble and gentle service*.” (IBID.)

The emerging image of the priestly heart configured to the heart of Christ is one of fidelity, humility, closeness, and gentleness. On the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart in 2015, Pope Francis, addressing those gathered for the Worldwide Retreat for Priests, spoke again of God’s closeness to us. God holds us, much like when a parent holds the hands of a child; he binds us with His love. This love binds us “but it binds in freedom; it binds while leaving you the space to respond with love.” Moreover, this closeness of God teaches priests how to “walk in the spirit”.

This walking in the Spirit speaks to the need of the priest to be not only prophetic but also discerning. On another occasion, addressing seminarians at the Spanish college, he said:

“At this point it is important to grow in the habit of discernment, which allows them to value every motion and moment, even that which seems in opposition and contradictory, and to sift out what comes from the Spirit, a grace that we should ask for on our knees. Only from this foundation ... will they be able to train others in that discernment that leads to Resurrection and Life.” (POPE FRANCIS, AUDIENCE WITH THE COMMUNITY OF THE PONTIFICAL SPANISH COLLEGE OF SAN JOSÉ, 1 APRIL 2017)

Often as priests, we must discern the presence of God, even amid persecution. The Feast of the Sacred Heart in 2015 occurred around the time of the martyrdom of 23 Coptic Christians.

The Holy Father reminded priests that God did not abandon these martyrs and remained in their midst. Using the image of the Good Shepherd who does not abandon the lost sheep, the Holy Father asked:

“What does Jesus say to us in Luke at Chapter 15 about that shepherd who noticed that he had 99 sheep for one was missing? He left them well safeguarded, locked away, and went to search for the other, who was ensnared in thorns.... And he didn’t beat it, didn’t scold it: he took it tightly in his arms and cared for it, for it was injured. Do you do the same with your faithful? When you realize that one of your flock is missing? Or are we accustomed to being a Church which has a single sheep in her flock and we let the other 99 get lost on the hill? Are you moved by all this compassion?” (HOMILY FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS, 12 JUNE 2015)

The heart of the priest must be both open to walking in the Spirit and full of compassion. In 2016, the Jubilee for Priests during the Year of Mercy coincided with the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart. The Holy Father examined the Merciful Heart of Christ, which welcomes and understands sinners, renewing the memory of the call and the first love of the priest. The love of the Sacred Heart is persevering and relentless, going out to those most distant – to the peripheries. Already in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis had written:

“Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.” (POPE FRANCIS, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 20)

Pope Francis invited priests to contemplate the Heart of Christ and posed a fundamental question:

Contemplating the Heart of Christ, we are faced with the fundamental question of our priestly life: *Where is my heart directed?* It is a question we need to keep asking, daily, weekly... *Where is my heart directed?* Our ministry is often full of plans, projects and activities: from catechesis to liturgy, to works of charity, to pastoral and administrative commitments. Amid all these, we must still ask ourselves: What is my heart set on? (HOMILY, SOLEMNITY OF THE SACRED HEART, JUBILEE FOR PRIESTS, 3 JUNE 2016)

In contemplating the treasures of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Father stated that the two greatest riches were His Heavenly Father and us. It is a reminder for the priest to encounter the Father in prayer and to be “open and available to others,” no longer looking to himself.

Two years earlier, Pope Francis had said that prayer was essential to priestly life if one was to be available to others:

“A priest who does not pray has closed the door, has closed the path of creativity. It is precisely in prayer, when the Spirit makes you feel something, the devil comes and makes you feel another, but prayer is the condition for moving forward. ... Prayer is the first step, because one must open oneself to the Lord to be able to open to others.” (Meeting with the Priests of the Diocese of Caserta, July 26, 2014)

This availability to others characterizes the priestly heart of Jesus. In that same homily, the Holy Father said that the priest is one who seeks out the lost, who includes others, and who is filled with joy.

A priestly heart is free to set aside its own concerns in favor of the flock, including the lost members. He said:

“Such is a heart that seeks out. A heart that does not set aside times and spaces as private. Woe to those shepherds to privatize their ministry! It is not jealous of its legitimate quiet time, even that, and never demands that it be left alone. A shepherd after the heart of God does not protect his own comfort zone. He is not worried about protecting his good name, but will be slandered as Jesus was. Unafraid of criticism, he is disposed to take risks in seeking to imitate his Lord.” (HOMILY, SOLEMNITY OF THE SACRED HEART, JUBILEE FOR PRIESTS, 3 JUNE 2016)

The priestly heart is inclusive in the sense that it seeks out the lost and is missionary, recognizing that the priestly anointing received is for the people:

He (the priest of Christ) is anointed for his people, not to choose his own projects but to be close to the real men and women whom God has entrusted to him. No one is excluded from his heart, his prayers or his smile. With a father’s loving gaze and heart, he welcomes and includes everyone, and if at times he has to correct, it is to draw people closer. He stands apart from no one, but is always ready to dirty his hands.” (IBID.)

In concluding, Pope Francis said that the heart of the priest must be filled with a joy born of forgiveness, a joy of a heart changed by mercy. Indeed, the heart of the priest, like the Heart of Christ, must be a large one, filled with missionary zeal, compassion, and joy.

In this year’s homily for the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, the Holy Father selected two words to celebrate the feast: to *choose* and *littleness*. He reminds priests that it was not they who chose God; rather, it was God who chose them. The true generosity is God’s. He pointed out that Moses reminded the people, after entering a covenant with God, that it was the Lord who bound Himself to the people. God chooses. The Holy Father reminds us that “We are chosen for love, and this is our identity.” (HOMILY, SOLEMNITY OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS, 23 JUNE 2017)

The vocation of the priest, rooted in the call to love, shows its true strength in that God chose us because of our smallness, not our might. Some might object, asking, “Does not God call the great ones of the earth too?” The Holy Father answered the objection, responding: “His Heart is open, but the great ones are not able to hear his voice because they are full of themselves. To hear the voice of the Lord, you have to make yourself little.” (IBID.)

The Holy Father suggests that the priestly heart is not self-referential; rather, through formation, the heart of the individual comes to encounter a central mystery of faith in the Heart of Christ:

“The heart of Christ, the pierced heart of Christ, the heart of Revelation, the heart of our faith – because He made Himself small, He chose this path. Paul uses some of these expressions: He abased Himself; humbled Himself; emptied himself unto death, death on a cross.” (IBID.)

Christ makes a “choice for littleness, so that the glory of God might be manifest.” The Pope concluded by saying that the problem of the faith is the “core of our life”; that is, one can be

virtuous but have little or no faith. Thus, the starting point for the disciple (and the priest who is always a disciple) is the mystery of Jesus who saved us with His faithfulness.

To summarize, a priestly heart, modeled after the heart of Christ, should be one that conveys the closeness and tenderness of God. It is a heart that is faithful in its steadfast love – a heart bound in love to the Father and to the flock. As such, the priest will have a missionary heart that seeks out the lost and joyfully draw others, humbly and gently, to the merciful love of God. The priest of today must be humble enough to receive love from God, who chose and called him, so that, recognizing his own littleness, he may share the love he has received with his people, even getting “his hands dirty” to manifest God’s glory.

The Love of the Heart of Christ in Action: The Example of Father Primo Mazzolari

As Pope Francis said in his 2013 Homily on the Sacred Heart, the love of God is sometimes expressed more clearly in action than in words. There are many saints and priests who have lived a spirituality enriched by devotion to the Heart of Jesus. In a powerful and symbolic way, this year, very close to the feast of the Sacred Heart (June 20, 2017), Pope Francis visited the tombs of two such priests, who were misunderstood and somewhat marginalized by the institutional church, but who manifest many of the characteristics just described: the Servant of God, don Primo Mazzolari (1890-1959) and don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967). For reasons of time, I have chosen to focus on Father Mazzolari, who is called the “parish priest of Italy” and whom John XXIII called “the bugle of the Holy Spirit in the lower Po Valley.”

Father Mazzolari was pressed into service at the time of the First World War and eventually became a military chaplain. During the 1920s, he opposed the rise of fascism in Italy and became a strong advocate for the poor. For his criticisms, he was exiled to a small parish in Bozzolo in 1932, where he gave himself entirely to his flock until his death. Of him Paul VI said, “His was a step too far, and we tried to hold him back. So, he suffered and so did we. This is the destiny of prophets.”

In visiting the tomb of don Primo, the Holy Father used three images to speak about the priestly heart in action: the river, the farmhouse, and the plain.

Father Mazzolari exercised his priesthood along the rivers, “symbols of the primacy and power of God’s grace flowing incessantly toward the world.” Here, he preached the Word of God and did not shelter himself from “the river of life.” He realized that people needed to hear the Truth of the Gospel, and this required faithful priests to repeat eternal truths. He wrote:

“The priest is a repeater, but his repetition must not be soulless, passive, without cordiality. Along with the truth that I repeat, there must be, I must put something of my own to show that I believe what I say; it must be done in such a way that the brother hears an invitation to the truth.” (PRIMO MAZZOLARI, *PRETI COSÌ*, 125-126)

The priest cannot be a functionary. He must be sincere in his proclamation and in his love. In this regard, the Pope warned of three temptations of priests that undermine the Gospel:

1. The temptation to look out the window without getting one’s hands dirty; seeing a problem, being critical of it but not doing anything to solve the problem, leading to bitterness;
2. The temptation to “separatist activism” which seeks to address problems by creating “Catholic” institutions but which loses sight of the mission, rallying around

the word “Catholic”, creating a type of elitism and excluding others, affirming what divides rather than seeking unity;

3. The temptation to take “refuge in the religious to circumvent the difficulties and disappointments” encountered in the ministry; that is, fleeing into the spiritual, disconnecting faith from concrete life and contemplation from action.

The Holy Father expects priests to have a courageous heart that engages the real problems of men and women; this requires being close to the Lord and the people. The second image used by Pope Francis was a farmhouse. Today, there are many who do not know Christ or who have left the Church; they are “homeless”. The Pope wants a Church that goes forth to meet them. Don Primo had foresight in this regard, writing:

“To walk, we must go out of the house and of the Church, if the people of God are no longer there; and to take care of and worry about those needs that, while not spiritual, are human needs and, just as they can cause man to be lost, they can also save him. The Christian has detached himself from man; our way of talking cannot be understood if we do not first introduce him to this road, which seems to lead farthest and is the safest. [...] To do a lot, one has to love a lot”. (P. MAZZOLARI, *COSCIENZA SOCIALE DEL CLERO* (ICAS: MILANO, 1947), 32.)

The priest, rooted in reality, has a heart that recognizes that wounded individuals are only gradually brought to faith. Wisely, this pastor said, “The priest is not one who requires perfection, but who helps each person give their best.” In some ways, he echoes the sentiments of the American football coach, whom I am sure you love in this part of the country, Vince Lombardi, who said: “We will chase perfection, and we will chase it relentlessly, knowing all the while we can never attain it. But along the way, we shall catch excellence.” The priest cannot overburden the people, but he gently guides them toward excellence rather than mediocrity.

The third image used is that of the great plain, one which opens without reassuring boundaries. This is the landscape of missionary territory. In don Primo’s lifetime, it was world war, fascism, and the extreme poverty of the people. Today, it is secularization, relativism, the crisis of refugees and migrants, and great poverty – material and spiritual. It is Pope Francis’ belief that authentic witness starts with the simplicity of life of the priest, offering credibility to his witness. Certainly, this was the case for Father Mazzolari who encouraged his brother priests “to listen to the world, to those who live and work in it, to take on every question of meaning and hope, without fear of passing through deserts and areas of darkness. In this way, we can become a poor Church for and with the poor, the Church of Jesus.”

To this he added: “The poor want to be loved as poor people, that is, without calculating their poverty,” foreshadowing the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* who encourages us “to find Christ in the poor, to lend our voices to their causes, but also to be their friends, to listen to them, to speak for them, and to embrace the mysterious wisdom the God wishes to share with us through them.” (APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *EVANGELII GAUDIUM*, 24 NOVEMBER 2013, 198)

In a very personal way, Pope Francis writes:

“I want to say, with regret, that the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care. The great majority of the poor have a special openness to the faith; they need God and we must not fail to offer them his friendship. ...” (EG, 200)

In the end, the priest must have a heart like Christ, a heart that is a burning furnace of charity. Father Primo Mazzolari, practiced what he preached, writing in his *Via Crucis*: “He who

knows the poor knows his brother; whoever sees the brother sees Christ; and, whoever sees Christ sees life and its true poetry, because charity is the poem of heaven brought to earth.” (P. Mazzolari, *Via Crucis del Povero*)

Conclusion

Today, the Church needs priests to be engaged in the new evangelization, using “new ardor, new methods, and new expressions.” (POPE JOHN PAUL II, SANTO DOMINGO, CONCLUSIONES, IV CELAM, 253) The increasing secularization of American society and the growing number of unchurched people are making this country and culture “missionary territory” once again – like the open plain of don Primo Mazzolari’s day.

The model of the priest proposed by the new *Ratio Fundamentalis* is one in which formation in its human, intellectual, pastoral, and spiritual dimensions is integrated. Such a priest is first and foremost a disciple of Jesus who learns to be “meek and humble of heart” like the Divine Master. This learning lasts a lifetime and involves allowing oneself to experience the gifts of God’s mercy and love so as to go forth joyfully to share those gifts with the People, communicating the tenderness and closeness of God. The Heart of the Redeemer was filled with warmth and compassion for his flock.

The *Ratio Fundamentalis* wants priests who are not just disciples but who are *missionary disciples*, that is, those who are willing to be “stubborn in doing good” and willing to seek out, even in unknown territory, the lost, forgotten, and wounded. This involves being with the people, even in remote regions, what we would call today the “geographic and existential peripheries.” It means having a desire not to be the one who looks out the office window or who always escapes to the chapel, but who is willing to labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

Today, the Church needs priests who are close not only to the people but to the Lord. Like the beloved disciple, we too must contemplate again and again the riches of the Heart of Christ, giving the mercy and love of God primacy in our hearts. This is the Church’s expectation for its clergy today. The task is daunting, but it is not impossible. Saint John Vianney is reported to have said, “the priesthood is the love of the Heart of Jesus.” This is certainly true, and His love will never abandon you.

Thank you.