

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
VISIT OF SEMINARIANS FROM THE PONTIFICAL COLLEGE JOSEPHINUM
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My Dear Brothers in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio and the Chancellor of the Pontifical College Josephinum, I want to welcome you here to the Nunciature. In a special way, I want to greet Bishop LaValley, Msgr. Schreck, who has served as Rector for seven years, and the other members of the faculty. I want to thank them for their commitment to your formation, which is extremely important work for the Church.

How appropriate that the Church gives us these readings as you prepare for ordination! For several weeks, the letter to the Hebrews has described Jesus, our great High Priest. He never ceases to intercede for us. He is an eternal Priest or, as today's readings call Him, "*the great Shepherd of the Sheep*." He is the priest who was willing to be a Victim, offering Himself for the forgiveness of sins. He is the Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down His life for the flock. Through His sacrifice we have been Redeemed. This is the life to which Christ is calling you – to offer yourselves, without reserve, for your flock! You will share in Christ's priesthood, which necessarily involves, freely offering yourselves as an oblation. The letter to the Hebrews exhorts: *Let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise*.

This is the noble vocation to which you are called, even in these troubled times. The Psalmist reminds us: *Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil, for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage*. You are being called to the priesthood of *Jesus Christ*. He will be with you to strengthen you, and you will be configured more and more to Him. While never ceasing to be a disciple of Jesus, as deacons and future priests, you have begun what the *Ratio Fundamentalis* calls the configuration stage of your formation.

If you are being configured to Jesus, then it is important to contemplate lessons Jesus teaches about ministry in today's Gospel. First, Jesus, the One sent by the Father, is also the One who sends. Saint Mark notes that the *Apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught*. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus had sent them out to preach, teach, cast out demons, and to heal the sick in His Name. By His power and authority, they did these things; they did not do them by their own strength. It was in obedience to Him that they advanced and proclaimed the Kingdom. Jesus teaches, or rather, reveals to us who He is – the Son of God – and who we need to be – humble and obedient servants of the Word.

Jesus, the Teacher, engages reality. He understands the humanity of the Apostles and the need for rest after exhausting pastoral work. *Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest for a while*. The disciples need rest. After all, nature builds on grace and perfects it. In life and ministry, we need balance. We need to rest, which is not the same thing as doing nothing, to be ready to do the Lord's work when He calls. We need to be apostolically available, not covetously guarding our time but being sensible about it. When need to go away to a deserted place, as Jesus did so often, to pray – to commune with the Lord and to "recharge" our "spiritual batteries." The Church does not need lazy priests. She needs healthy, balanced, prayerful priests, who have enough sense and self-awareness to know when to rest and when to spring into action.

On the Jubilee for Priests during the Year of Mercy, 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)

Even though the disciples went to take rest, the people, with their many needs, made demands upon them. Jesus again teaches his disciples not to look at the people as a nuisance or a burden but as children in need of the Father’s mercy. With the shortage of priests, you will experience similar demands. The letter to the Hebrews offers advice: *Do not neglect to do the good and to share what you have. God is pleased by sacrifices of that kind.*

Are you ready to spend yourself in the service of God joyfully, or will every sick call, every request from a beggar, every struggling parent seem like an intrusion? A priestly heart is free to set aside its own concerns in favor of the flock. Pope Francis again says:

“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. ... 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)

Jesus wants His Apostles to imitate Him. What does He do in today’s Gospel? Saint Mark tells us: *When Jesus disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.* Jesus saw the vast crowd. He saw them not only with His eyes, but also with His Heart. He casts a pastoral gaze to see where there is need for mercy. We should ask ourselves: Do I have a heart that sees?

He was moved with pity for them. He showed compassion. To have compassion means literally “to suffer with another.” It doesn’t mean to put another person out of his or her misery; nor does it mean to tolerate every vice, which would be a false compassion; rather, to have compassion means to show the tenderness and closeness of God, offering not only justice but especially His Mercy. If our human formation has not helped us develop compassionate hearts that are able to empathize with a sometimes fragile flock, able to walk with them, gently leading them back to the right path, then all the theological knowledge in the world will be of little value in showing forth the attractiveness of Christ to a person who sincerely wants to walk with the Lord.

In addition to seeing and having compassion, Jesus began to teach them many things. He taught them the things that really mattered – that impacted their lives. He did not need to be abstract or scholarly; rather, He wanted them to know the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Your time in seminary is nearly finished. Seminary is a privileged place for learning from professors, from books, from one another, but especially from the Lord Jesus. Immediately following this Gospel passage, Jesus acts on what He has seen; He performs the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes – with all its Eucharistic overtones. He has come to nourish the people with His Word and with His very life. This is what you, our future priests, must offer to the flock that hungers

and thirsts for truth and life. It is no easy task, but from Christ Himself you have received the best education in how to live your priesthood – His priesthood.

May the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the Blood of the eternal covenant, furnish you with all that is good, that you may do his will. May he carry out in you what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.