

HOMILY

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Bishop of Brooklyn
Homily for Solemn Vespers and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament
2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
Chapel of the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception
Sunday, October 24, 2010 (Evening Prayer II, Week 2)
80th Anniversary Celebration of the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception

“He called you through our preaching the good news so that you might achieve the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 *Thessalonians* 2:14)



Bishop Murphy, Bishop Mar Eusebius, Bishop Libasci, Bishop Dunne, Bishop Wcela, Reverend Fathers, deacons, women and men in consecrated life, members of the Board of Governors, faculty and staff, students of the theology programs here at the seminary, Friends of the Seminary, guests, and especially our honorees – dear seminarians.

1. Our Celebration of a Vision

On this glorious fall afternoon we gather in this beautiful chapel around the Eucharistic Lord who is present on our altar where we offer Him our adoration, praise, and thanksgiving. Before Him we humbly offer our petitions so that we may come to know and to do His will. We ask Him to have mercy on us for the times in which our own frailty and limitations have kept us from doing His will. May we be like the publican of today’s Gospel who only asks mercy.

This afternoon we gather to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception. Within the context of this Eucharistic Holy Hour and Solemn Vespers, we give thanks to God for the many ways in which this seminary has served the Church on Long Island and beyond over the last 80 years.

The vision to build this seminary was that of the third bishop of Brooklyn, Thomas E. Molloy (1921-1956), when the Diocese of Brooklyn was made up of the four counties of Long Island. That vision was shared by the pastors, religious women and men, and lay faithful of an immigrant Church. It was brought to fulfillment by the leadership of pastors filled with a zeal for holiness, religious women and men who had dedicated their lives to Catholic education, and a most generous, selfless laity whose love for the Church and the priesthood were recorded in the diocesan newspaper, *The Tablet*, throughout the years of the diocesan campaign to build the seminary. That vision linked the importance of the seminary's mission in the formation of men for the ministerial priesthood as an ecclesial responsibility for the entire diocese which would advance the growth of the Church and assist her mission of the evangelization of culture. In his dedication address of September 28, 1930, delivered on the front steps of this building before an estimated crowd of over 25,000 people, Bishop Molloy proclaimed:

They [priests] will also prove to be moreover, staunch defenders of the weak, of the unfortunate, of the underprivileged and even of the unborn. They will ever serve as fearless advocates of liberty under law...of the sanctity of marriage, of integrity of character in public office.... [A]s Catholics then, we heartily rejoice today because this newly dedicated Seminary guarantees our future spiritual and religious leadership. As citizens we are glad also because we behold in the purpose and objectives of this institution a new hope for the preservation and protection of the ideals and institutions of our Country and a new pledge of future civic righteousness and social peace, justice, order and good will.¹

The changes, at times revolutionary, which have marked the past 80 years in our world, our nation, our culture, and our Church, have had their influence on this noble institution. You are familiar with the changes within the local Church: the demographic growth of the Church on Long Island which resulted in the formation of the Diocese of Rockville Centre in 1957, the impact of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) on the study of Sacred Theology and the formation process itself which led the bishops in the United States, in communion with the Holy See, to publish the *Program of Priestly Formation (PPF)*.

¹ *The Tablet*, October 4, 1930, 3.

Revisions in this document demand and reflect the highest and most thorough standards of excellence in the program of formation, especially in light of the tragic scandal that has marked our Church.

In 1974, the Seminary admitted the first students who were not preparing for ordination to the ministerial priesthood. Since then the seminary has responded to the growing number of students who have pursued various theological degrees in addition to the M.Div degree for the seminarians: the M.A. (1982), the Doctor of Ministry (1987), the Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (2004). It has opened its doors to candidates for the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Rockville Centre, and to many other spirituality and retreat programs for clergy, laity, and religious in both the Diocese of Brooklyn and the Diocese of Rockville Centre. The seminary has undergone numerous re-accreditations and we pray for the successful outcome of the current re-accreditation process. Life here has seen major developments influenced by changes in technology: a seminary website, the conversion to an electronic library catalogue, the recent publication of our online journal, *Seat of Wisdom*, and the fact that this seminary is one of only fifteen in the entire country which participates in the Catholic Distance Learning Network (CDLN).

The seminary has never lost its immigrant character. Sustained by the prayer and financial sacrifice of so many immigrants it continues to welcome and truly reflect the identity of the universal Catholic Church. A glimpse of the universality of the Church can be seen in the current roster of our seminarians who are studying for our dioceses on Long Island, in addition to the men who are from, and studying for, the dioceses of Daejeon in Korea, Tsumbe in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kabale in Uganda, Konongo-Mampong in Ghana, and the seminarians from the Eastern Exarchate of the Syro-Malankara Church in the USA. I know I speak also for Bishop Murphy in expressing our gratitude to our brother bishops, and in extending a hearty welcome to the seminarians from those dioceses and the exarchate who are among our honorees this evening.

2. God's Word: the Call and the Challenge

In the reading which we have just listened to from St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle of the Gentiles seeks to confirm, and to strengthen the young Christian community against the false teachers and prophets who are preaching an imminent *parousia*, a false eschatology. St. Paul does not wish them to be discouraged or alarmed about an imminent apocalyptic ending that is being taught by self-appointed teachers who use their own words in fashioning a teaching that is contrary to the gospel.

St. Paul is clear. His hearers are the ones who have been chosen, called by God. In the midst of propaganda, seductive rhetoric, and words crafted by clever teachers, the Christian community at Thessalonika should cling to the gospel which he has proclaimed. In the next verse he urges them to “stand firm...hold fast to the tradition you received from us” (2 *Thess.* 2:15). In the fourth century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c 315-387) in his famous and timeless *Catechetical Lectures* preached on the integrity of the wholeness of the faith, one which each community has the responsibility to hand on to the next generation irrespective of the current popular trend or most recent jargon. St. Cyril wrote that “...the articles of the faith have not been composed to please human desire.”²

3. Interior Formation in the Midst of Change & Popular Trends

Yes, our times and this seminary have seen many changes. One could even locate more changes, especially in the daily rhythm of seminary life, in a comparison between the *Seminary Rule* of the Molloy years and the current *Seminarian Handbook*. As interesting and perhaps even as tempting as that would be, it is a discourse for another time and place.

In the midst of the whirlwind of changes, however, there remains a constant about the life of the seminary community. The *Seminary Rule* of the 1930s as well as the seminal document on priestly formation of the Servant of God Pope John Paul II, *Pastores dabō vobis* (1992), and the most recent edition, the fifth, of the USCCB’s *Program of Priestly Formation* (2006), all, I repeat, all insist that the mission of the seminary is to form “priests after the heart of God.” Or, as the more recent documents insist, the formation program which leads to priestly ordination is to form priests with the “heart of Christ, the Good Shepherd.” Bishop Murphy gave eloquent expression to the endless love which must fill the hearts of priests “*usque ad finem*” in his September 2009 letter to priests to mark the recent Year for Priests when he wrote:

This is your life and you live it with a fidelity that must cause the angels to sing. There is a love that flows from your hearts because it first flowed from His Sacred Heart into yours.³

How does that happen? The bishops, members of the Board of Governors, faculty and staff, and our honorees, the seminarians, know the answer. Allow me

² St. Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catechetical Lectures 5.12” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Edited by Peter Gorday. General Ed. Thomas C. Oden. (Downers Grove, Ill., InterVarsity Press, 2000), 115.

³ Bishop William Murphy, “*After His Own Heart*” A Personal Letter to the Priests of the Diocese. (September 13, 2009), 12-13.

to repeat it for everyone: the integration of the four (4) pillars of formation: the human, the spiritual, the intellectual, and the pastoral will result in the seminarian/future priest taking on the Heart of Christ. The *Program of Priestly Formation* goes on:

Since spiritual formation is the core that unifies the life of a priest, it stands at the heart of seminary life and is the center around which all other aspects are integrated.⁴

4. The Drama of the Chapel

Furthermore, allow me to suggest that there is no more dramatic place where that occurs than here in this chapel. The chapel is usually cold physically, but very warm spiritually. While there have been changes in architectural form and the rites of liturgical cult over the past 80 years, the desires, the longing, and the needs of the human heart have not changed. For sure, every seminarian and every other person who has studied, worked, been on retreat, or come to this seminary for any reason has entered this chapel longing to encounter and deepen his or her experience of the mystery of God's love. For that which transcends the fragility of time is the mystery of God's love present in the Word who became flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Here, each day, at this altar, the celebration of the Paschal mystery of the Lord's Cross and Resurrection confirms the Lord's abiding presence within each member of the seminary community, serves to integrate prayer, study, and the mission of this seminary, and strengthens the indispensable ecclesial bond of charity.

As the Servant of God Pope John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992), the daily Eucharistic celebration in the seminary will train candidates to the priesthood, and in fact, all of us, to share "in the intimate dispositions which the Eucharist fosters: gratitude... self-offering...charity... and the yearning to contemplate and bow in adoration before Christ..."⁵ We must be clear that

Only within the breathing space of adoration can the Eucharistic celebration indeed be alive... Even the authority of the priest must in the end be adoration, must spring from adoration and culminate in adoration.⁶

⁴ *Program of Priestly Formation* #115. 5th edition. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 48.

⁵ *Pastores dabo vobis* #48. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (1992), 133.

⁶ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. *God Is Near Us*. Edited by Stephan Otto Horn and Vinzenz Pfnür. Translated by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003), 96-97.

Here, in this beautiful chapel, for 80 years, seminarians, deacons, priests, retreatants, the graduate students of theology, seminary staff, and visitors alike have all taken the time to gaze upon the Lord, to open and surrender their hearts to His Heart in the intimacy of Eucharistic communion. Here, in this beautiful chapel, they have discovered their deepest selves and have come to better understand their role in the mission of the Church. Here, in this beautiful chapel, gazing on and contemplating the Eucharistic Lord, one is truly brought out into the deep. I truly believe that, "Each life in the journey of faith requires us to go beyond the limits that we have imposed upon ourselves."⁷ Here, in this beautiful chapel, so many have discovered the infinite love God has for us, a love which has been sealed by the Blood of His only Son, Jesus. The next time you go up beyond the wrought iron grille to pray before Jesus present in the Tabernacle, note the inscription on the Tabernacle, "*Ecce Panis Angelorum*" and let the "bread of the angels" become your daily bread, the one source of your nourishment.

5. Conclusion

Yes, we gather here with great joy to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception. Today also marks World Mission Sunday. As we contemplate and adore the Eucharistic presence of Jesus on our altar we both know and "feel" the enthusiasm of the Church to bring Christ's love to the world. How beautiful and how awesome it is to know that from this place where our hearts have been pierced by His Sacred Heart, and our lives transformed by the gospel which has been preached to us, we have become partakers in the "glory of the Lord Jesus Christ." We have become ambassadors and servants of His glory for it is a glory which is meant to be given in the service of the whole world.

On the occasion of this 80th anniversary we entrust ourselves and this seminary to the maternal care and powerful intercession of the patroness of the Seminary, Mary Immaculate. In his homily given in St. Peter's Square on World Mission Sunday in 2003, Pope Benedict XVI concluded his reflection by inviting his listeners to turn to Mary. He said:

...we must all start afresh from the Eucharist. Mary, Woman of the Eucharist, will help us to "fall in love" with it, she will help us to "remain" in Christ's love, to be deeply renewed by him.⁸

⁷ Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio's weekly column, "Put Out into the Deep" in *The Tablet*, September 18, 2010, 4.

⁸ Benedict XVI, "The Eucharist As the Way to Holiness" in *Heart of the Christian Life: Thoughts on the Mass* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 37.

On this historic occasion, this moment of grace, let us turn to the Immaculate Virgin of Nazareth who always accompanies us on our pilgrimage to Him and let us all “start afresh” transformed by His abiding presence within us.

