

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Opening Mass at St. Mary's Seminary, Roland Park

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*St. Mary's Seminary, Roland Park*

*Aug. 28, 2019*

## **Introduction**

As we begin a new year of formation, I would imagine that many thoughts and feelings fill your minds and hearts. If you are new to St. Mary's Seminary, you must get to know a new community, with traditions that may be new to you, and a whole new faculty. If you are returning to St. Mary's Seminary, you may be thinking of the challenges and opportunities that await you here in the chapel, the classroom, the community, the apostolate, and more. Please count on my prayers and support.

Yet, living as we do in a highly technological culture, we may also begin this new academic year with an unspoken assumption, viz., that the truly challenging fields of study are not theology or the humanities, but rather, the so-called "hard" sciences – such as biology, chemistry, and physics. Indeed many think of theology and other aspects of priestly formation as "soft", i.e. to say, inexact, non-rigorous, highly subjective, & lacking in tangible outcomes. Your faculty certainly doesn't see it that way and neither should you. There is nothing "soft" about priestly formation. While it does not follow the scientific method, your formation is indeed methodical, probing, far-reaching and far-seeing. It is meant to challenge every dimension of your existence in ways that empirical and specialized studies do not.

I say this not to scare or to discourage you but rather to join with your faculty in inviting you to embrace wholeheartedly the opportunities for growth that this new year of formation offers you. And even as today you pledge to give your "all" to the work of priestly formation, let no one imagine that it is a merely human enterprise, fueled solely by your effort and good will or by your wit and wisdom. In fact, the

saint of the day, St. Augustine, teaches us just the opposite. He teaches us our utter reliance on the grace of the Holy Spirit if we would listen to the voice of the Lord and assimilate his virtues.

## **The Importance of Augustine**

So, as you set out on the adventure of a new year of formation, I would suggest that you adopt St. Augustine as a favored guide. And, truth to tell, you really won't escape him, either in the chapel or the classroom. For starters, in the Liturgy of the Hours, no patristic writer appears more frequently than the great Bishop of Hippo, St. Augustine. He is seen more frequently in the Breviary than St. Leo the Great, Gregory, the Cappadocians, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Bernard. This isn't surprising since no ancient Christian writer left behind more writings than did the prolific Augustine - but it could also be argued that few patristic writers were more influential than he. Augustine left his mark not only on the Church but indeed on Western civilization.

With that in mind, I'd invite you to be alert to the voice of St. Augustine as you prayerfully contemplate the Office of Readings throughout the year of formation that lies ahead. This afternoon, I'll suggest three ways Augustine might serve as our guide: 1) Conversion and discipleship 2) Prayer 3) Pastoral Charity. A word about each.

## **How Augustine Guides Us: Conversion and Discipleship**

First and foremost, let me urge you to allow St. Augustine to lead you in the ways of conversion and discipleship. As you know, St. Augustine gave us a spiritual autobiography, the Confessions, in which he both confesses his faults and confesses, i.e., acclaims the praises of God. In doing so, he unfolds for us his spiritual journey - a journey that led him from his Christian upbringing, to the embrace of Manichean philosophy, through a life at odds with the Gospel, to his encounter with Christ thru St. Ambrose, and thus his subsequent conversion and baptism and ministry as priest and bishop.

Augustine describes for us how, in the midst of this journey, he was led to seek the truth and to seek it passionately. Yet, as he was looking for the truth outside of

himself, in the beauty of creation, all the time the Lord was within him, calling to him from the depths of his own soul. The God who loves us first took the initiative in rescuing his soul from the darkness of sin and the mirages of error.

So, when you come across excerpts from the Confessions in the Liturgy of the Hours, read them not as snippets from a literary classic but rather as an invitation to allow God to take the initiative in your own life, to break through that lack of self-awareness that sin and self-centeredness induce, to bring about in you that humble spirit of repentance and conversion, which always constitute the first step in truly becoming the Lord's disciples. Allow the Lord to lead you to discover the beauty and greatness of his love, such that your whole life will be shaped by his self-giving love, a love you will extend, not only for your friends but also for your enemies, and, above all, for the people whom you shall someday serve as priests.

### **How St. Augustine Guides Us: Formation in Prayer**

Along the way, St. Augustine also guides us in the ways of prayer. He opens for us the pages of John's Gospel, helps us to appreciate the Psalms, and shares with us an intimate instruction on prayer in his Letter to Proba, which we read during the 29th week of Ordinary Time. In that letter, St. Augustine teaches us not only how to persist in prayer but also to exercise and expand our desire for God through prayer, such that our hearts will be prepared to receive what it is God wishes to give us. He teaches us how to mark our progress in prayer, how to pray without ceasing, how not to try God's patience with our words but rather to beseech him with our sighs, that is to say, with a heart that is contrite, humble, and longing for holiness. If we allow him to do so, St. Augustine will open our eyes to the Our Father, the Lord's own prayer, which we can easily pray so thoughtlessly but which contains in itself, as if in a capsule, all the petitions found in Scripture.

St. Augustine will also teach us how to keep on praying even when we are tempted to think that God is not listening, or when, in times of difficulty, we are tempted to think he has abandoned us. He teaches us to rely on the Holy Spirit in our life of prayer, the Spirit who helps us in our weakness and prompts us to ask of God blessings that are deeper, wider, and more mysterious than all those things we think that we so desperately need. Again and again, Augustine will set our sights on the

happiness that can be ours when, by a life of prayer and contemplation, we anticipate the joys of heaven.

### **How St. Augustine Guides Us: Pastoral Charity**

And finally, St. Augustine is our guide in the ways of pastoral charity. Learned though he was, skilled in rhetoric though he was, Augustine knew how to bring the faith home to ordinary people, as we so often see in his many sermons scattered throughout the Liturgy of the Hours. It is said that Augustine preached two or three times per week, that many of his sermons were “off the cuff” but captured by stenographers, and it is easy to see why the people of Hippo kept coming to hear him. He not only taught them, he also engaged them, weaving together liturgy and life. One can sense in these homilies Augustine’s genuine love and affection for his people and between the lines, their love and affection for him.

But one sermon of his has a special claim on our consciences, viz., “On Pastors” a sermon which we read during the 24th and 25th Week of Ordinary Time. This extraordinary sermon serves as an examination of conscience for pastors— and, may I say, for aspiring pastors of souls – both as to right conduct in the ministry and to our motives for engaging in ministry. Before the word “clericalism” was coined, Augustine warns us against clericalism, that self-inflated and self-centered approach to ministry that corrodes the faith of God’s People and saps the Church’s vitality to evangelize. After all these years in ministry, I do not find this sermon to be easy reading and I pray that you also will never find it anything less than challenging.

### **Conclusion**

And that, dear friends, is just Volume IV of the Breviary! Imagine if we looked at Augustine’s writings in the other three volumes! Of course, you will go through them, prayerfully and faithfully, and I pray that St. Augustine will guide you by his teaching and strengthen you by his prayers so that you may experience that restlessness of spirit that only God’s love can quell. Such is the key to discipleship, to priestly zeal, and to evangelization. May God bless you and keep you always in his love.