

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Opening Mass of the Holy Spirit; Mt. St. Mary's Seminary

Opening Mass of the Holy Spirit

Mt. St. Mary's Seminary

August 17, 2017

It is a pleasure to offer this Mass of the Holy Spirit, asking the guidance, wisdom, love and strength of the Spirit as we begin a new year of priestly formation here at Mt. St. Mary's.

For those of you who are newly arrived at the Seminary and from outside the Archdiocese of Baltimore, I bid you a warm welcome to the nation's first diocese, the Premier See, founded in 1789 with Archbishop John Carroll as its first bishop. If you are a seminarian from the Archdiocese of Baltimore, then there is no need for me to welcome you . . . you are already most welcome . . . but I think you know that!

To Msgr. Baker and the faculty and staff here at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary - my deepest thanks for the excellent priestly formation you provide and my congratulations on your attracting so many new seminarians this year. To President Trainor, warmest thanks for your presence this evening and for your unstinting support of this, the nation's second oldest seminary, and, if my facts are correct, the second largest seminary in the United States. Msgr. Baker, I think we can assure President Trainor that our soccer team will do everything in its power to secure the Vianney Cup this year!

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us, now, to reflect well and wisely on the living Word of God in the form of the Scripture readings which the Church offers us today for our spiritual nourishment, beginning with our first reading from the Book of Joshua.

As you recall, that reading pertains to the last leg of the Israelites' journey out of

Egypt, through the desert, and into the promised land, that land flowing with milk and honey. We see how once again God parted the waters so that the Ark of the Covenant, borne by the priests, could precede the people as they entered that land God swore he would give to Abraham's descendants.

It is tempting to misinterpret this reading, thus our need for the Holy Spirit. For sitting where you're sitting some 44 years ago, I might have been tempted to see the priesthood itself as the Promised Land, a land flowing indeed with milk, honey, respect and comfort – if only someone would part the stormy waters of formation so that I could pass through with relative ease, from penury to prosperity. Fortunately the formation faculty back in those days quickly brought me and my classmates to our senses long before we were ordained priests – for that I thank the dear Lord!

You probably do not suffer from that temptation but I suspect it would hurt for me to suggest another interpretation. So, reading the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, let us see the Ark of the Covenant as referring to the Mother of God for she carried in her womb the Son of God, the living Word of God. Let us also see the Ark as referring to the Church as modeled upon Mary, who continually brings into the world the Christ who saved us from our sins by sealing the New Covenant in his Blood. We might add that the Ark together with the People represent the whole Church, the Holy People of God, called from darkness into God's wonderful light. For their part, the priests are bearing the Ark of the Covenant – *their* calling is to be ministers of the New Covenant, proclaimed at every Mass in the Consecration of the Precious Blood. *Their* calling is to lead the people of God through the waters of Baptism to the real Promised Land, foreshadowed even now, the New and Eternal Jerusalem, that festal gathering of angels and saints round the glorious throne of the Triune God.

In this interpretation, you are being formed not for your own private "promised land" but rather for a life of service to Jesus and to the Church – proclaiming, actualizing, and living the mysteries of our salvation, leading people from death to new life and from new life to glory. It is an exalted calling requiring of us a deep humility for it is the Lord and his People we are preparing to serve. And our service consists in offering ourselves completely as once to the Lord Jesus poured out his life for us and for our salvation. The Gospel Reading from Matthew

The reading from St. Matthew's Gospel also offers us a window on the priestly calling you are discerning and for which you are being formed. As you recall, in this Gospel reading Jesus speaks to us of forgiveness. Jesus tells us a parable that demonstrates for us God's limitless willingness to forgive our sins, to forgive us our trespasses. But if we would be true followers of the Son of God who came into the world to cancel the unbearable debt of our accumulated sins, then we too must demonstrate a boundless capacity to forgive one another. Again and again Jesus makes this point to his disciples: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us!"

"Blessed are those who show mercy, for mercy shall be theirs."

"If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions."

And again, at the end of the parable we just heard, Jesus warns us that our fate will be as bad as that of the unforgiving servant unless we are forgive our brother. In today's Office of Readings, St. Gregory of Nyssa also warns us that "we [should] never risk the life of our souls by being resentful or bearing grudges."

This fundamental lesson in discipleship applies to every Christian, of course, but it applies in a very special way to you who are being formed for what St. Paul calls, "a ministry of reconciliation." A priest's life is all about the forgiveness of Jesus - in his own life the priest must be a *witness* to the Lord's forgiving and redeeming love so that he can be a credible *minister* of the Lord's reconciling love - in his preaching, in celebrating the Mass and the Sacraments, in his daily interactions with parishioners and those whom he hopes to evangelize. How important that all of us who are priests and for you who are being formed to become priests - how important that we participate deeply, in the depths of our hearts, in the holiness and mercy and love of our God (Cf. CCC 2842). How important to allow the power of God's reconciling love to work in our hearts, so much so that we learn let go even of those deep-seated injuries that are so hard to forgive and to forget. We may struggle with this throughout our lives but if we allow God to forgive us then, in the power of the Holy Spirit, our injuries will no longer make us bitter but instead transform us into men who are prayerful and compassionate, ministers of the New Covenant who invite those we serve to experience the power of the Lord's reconciling love.

May the Holy Spirit overshadow this Seminary community throughout the year ahead, and may the same Spirit fill each of your hearts with his love, so that you experience deeply the joy of the Lord's reconciling love and be prepared to be not only his disciples but also priests of the New Covenant. Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church, may God bless us and keep us always in his love!