

Christmas Party for Seminarians and Their Families; 5th Day, Octave of the Lord's Nativity

I. Introduction - The Soul of Brevity

Dear family members and friends of our seminarians, All day long the seminarians have been insisting that my homily tonight should be no less than 45 minutes and that it should delve into the most obscure aspects of the Incarnation. But I urged our seminarians, please to restrain their enthusiasm and promised to speak no less than 30 minutes. They're very disappointed, so I'm counting on you to cheer them up!

II. Holding Jesus in Our Arms

A. Actually, I'd like to offer a very brief and simple reflection on the touching scene in this evening's Gospel reading. Simeon was a man of deep faith, part of that remnant of Israel that was longing and praying for the coming of the Savior. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he came to the temple. There he encountered Mary and Joseph - and the Child Jesus. He took Jesus in his arms and gave God thanks and praise, with these words:

Lord, now you let your servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled: my own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel.

B. Those who pray the Church's night prayer repeat Simeon's words as each day's work comes to an end. As I say those words each night I am nearly drifting off to

sleep but sometimes still have the presence of mind to put myself in Simeon's place - to realize that during the day just ending, the Lord has been placed in my arms - entrusted to me - in the Eucharist that I have held with my hands, in the Word I have proclaimed, in the people with whom I have interacted. And I ask myself if my eyes of faith truly glimpsed the salvation which our God has prepared for every person in this Archdiocese.

I ask myself if the light of the Christ I held in my arms that day was reflected in my words, actions, and demeanor.

C. Whether or not you pray the Liturgy of the Hours, the Canticle of Simeon is a beautiful prayer at the end of a day. It is a way of prolonging the joy of Christmas in our hearts all year long. It is a way of renewing our faith in Jesus born for our salvation. It puts into perspective all the turmoil, noise, and confusion that marks our days by focusing our eyes of faith on Jesus whom we encounter in so many ways.

III. Conclusion

A. This evening, as we celebrate this Holy Mass within the Octave of Christmas, let us ask to eyes of faith like those Simeon - who responded so readily to the promptings of the Holy Spirit so as to encounter the Lord Jesus. Let us ask for the tenderness of Simeon so that we too make take the Lord into our hearts with love. And let us ask for the righteousness of Simeon, whose obedience to the Word of God allowed the light of the Father's love to shine upon him as he gazed at the Child in his arms.

B. I am grateful, dear friends, for your openness to priestly vocations in your families and I am very proud of you, the seminarians of the Archdiocese. I ask all of you to pray for the many young men who are considering a priestly vocation here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Pray that they too will have the courage to encounter

Christ and spread his light by responding with love and generosity to a priestly vocation. Through the prayers of Blessed Simeon may all of us experience the joys of Christmas all year long.

May God bless us and keep us always in his love!