

# Installation of Very Rev. Thomas R. Hurst, S.S

This is a most significant, even an historic, moment in the history of St. Mary's Seminary and University, and well aware of that, I must begin by stating how happy I am and privileged to be the installing prelate as the Reverend Thomas R. Hurst, of the society of St. Sulpice and priest of the Diocese of Albany, becomes its President-Rector.

The joy and importance of the occasion is evidenced by the presence of so many of you, God's faithful people, the Board of Directors, visiting academic dignitaries, alumni and present-day students, and, of course, members of the Sulpician community with Father Ronald Witherup, the Provincial Superior of the American Province of the Society, and the good number of our bishops, many of whom are also alumni of this singular institution.

Fr. Thomas Hurst, since your principal duty will be the formation of men for the Catholic priesthood and since this noble institution holds the pride of place as the first seminary in the U.S., I will direct my remarks principally to your role as seminary rector, aware of course that as its University President your responsibilities are extensive indeed.

You are, of course, the successor of a large and distinguished line of Sulpician rectors of St. Mary's, including Fr. Robert Leavitt, our most recent President-Rector, whose 27 years in office, have resulted in the growth of St. Mary's in so many grace-filled areas. But if that distinguished line of rectors might add a bit of pressure as you begin your responsibilities, Thomas, you have little to fear, given your familiarity with and love of this Seminary as student and as twice a member of this faculty.

Indeed you are a well-tested seminary administrator and will prove yourself here to be a most responsible priest president and rector. Indeed, the by-laws of this institution state that as President-Rector, you are responsible to the Board of Trustees for the overall performance of your duties. You are responsible to the Sulpician Provincial Council for the implementation of Sulpician principles and directives. And, for the implementation of church teaching and norms for seminaries and ecclesiastical faculties, you are responsible to the Archbishop of Baltimore and Chancellor of the Ecclesiastical Faculty.

It is so appropriate that you have chosen the Feast of St. Andrew as the day of your Installation. The Gospels relate two early encounters of St. Andrew with Jesus, encounters which can be seen as basically complementary. In the Gospel just read, we have a picture of the Lord walking on the seashore and passing two brothers, Peter and Andrew, casting their net into the lake. Jesus simply invites, "Follow me and I will

make you fishers of men.” No bargains, promises, contracts or dialogues of discernment: “And they left their nets and followed Him!” That drawing power of Jesus, that reassuring call, has been experienced since then and down through the ages, even to this day and to this place this night. In our day, the gift of Jesus’ call must be nurtured by a seminary leadership, themselves so driven by the call of Christ as to deepen that call in the lives of other, younger apostles.

But John’s Gospel tells of an earlier encounter, when Andrew in all likelihood, first met Jesus. Here we find John the Baptist standing with two of his followers, one of whom is Andrew, and as Jesus walked by, John said, “There is the Lamb of God.” Immediately they followed him. Jesus turns and asks, “What are you looking for?” And when they respond “Rabbi, where are you staying? He invites, “Come and see.” They went and saw where he stayed and spent the rest of that day with him.”

The first seminary experience: meeting, living and staying with Jesus, a mysterious experience, often unexplainable, as to how or why a heart is captured by Christ. But it is a call now as then that needs ongoing encounter with Christ in prayer, pondering his word, and the encouraging support of a like-minded community of would-be disciples.

The *Program of Priestly Formation* states that this spiritual welfare of the faculty and students is a central responsibility of the rector – a rector “carefully prepared in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special spiritual and theological training. The Rector (it states) should be a model of priestly virtue, able to live humbly the qualities he encourages in students.”

Men of this seminary community of St. Mary, I have known Father Hurst and have witnessed his seminary leadership when, as Military Archbishop, I accepted the offer of office space in Theological College as he served as rector. Myself a former dozen-year seminary rector, I assure you I did not miss much. I saw Father Thomas Hurst then, as you are seeing him now, to be a spiritual, pastoral and intellectual leader who fulfills all the expectations, and more, in the Church’s portrait of a solid seminary rector.

This is surely not to canonize Father Hurst, for I know him too well – and in total self-disclosure – I must state also that he knows me too well! But a rector’s success will depend so much on the faculty – priests, religious, and laity – totally dedicated to priestly formation, who credibly witness to the Gospel in their own lives. And, thanks once more to the Sulpician tradition, I am convinced before God, to say that this, a Seminary for which I am responsible, will have a faculty fully dedicated to priestly formation in complete conformity with our Church’s Magisterium, a Magisterium which is “Christ’s gift to his Church: a Magisterium which is the vital, integral and authoritative voice in the theological enterprise” of St. Mary’s Seminary.

Finally, may I address our seminarians? The leadership of your new rector and your faculty is the Church’s special gift to you at this most formative moment in your life in Jesus Christ. Listen to the words of the great John Paul II in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*:

“All formation, priestly formation included, is ultimately self-formation. No one can replace us in the

responsible freedom that we have as individual persons.”

Ultimately, then, it comes down to you, candidates for the priesthood. Sound seminary formation allows much more freedom in your path to the altar than was the case in my day and even in the days of your rector, a first theologian here in 1968. So I pose the question: How responsible is the freedom that is yours each day?

The freedom Paul spoke of so often: Freedom to be enjoyed not as giving free range to the flesh but a freedom that makes you slaves of one another through love (Gal. 5:13) is a far cry from the freedom of the secularist gospels of the day.

In exhorting you to commit yourselves to true gospel freedom, I would point to the reflections of the late Father Raymond Brown, a Sulpician friend revered by many of us here this evening. In his landmark work, *Priest and Bishop*, he reflects on the gospel call of Christ to every disciple, to all the baptized. According to Father Brown, Jesus demanded an almost mono-maniacally consuming response on the part of every follower, allowing no thing and no one to distract the disciple from a total and simple hearted embrace of Jesus and his gospel. And since that mono-maniacally consuming vocational call is ours to respond to today, here and now, at this moment, permit me to challenge each of you seminarians to recommit yourself to that selfless and total commitment to the Lord now, and in a specific manner, in your candid dealings with your spiritual director. I would seriously suggest that if you are not being completely honest and open with your spiritual director – as I trust you are – you must be so now or take leave of seminary formation for a second look to see if you, like Andrew, are truly being called by Christ to serve the people of God.

And so, Father Hurst, yours is a most challenging, demanding undertaking in and for the Church of Christ. Thanks be to God you have begun your rectorship with admirable and convincing personal testimony in your clear and frequent setting forth of your own vision of priesthood and priestly formation, a vision supported by our faculty, students and the many friends of this fine seminary.

So may I conclude with a prayerful reflection on priestly formation with every expectation that the experience of Andrew and the earliest apostles of the Lord can and will be realized in this collaborative communio of St. Mary’s Seminary. Again, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* speaks:

“In its deepest identity, the seminary is called to be, in its own way, a continuation in the Church of the apostolic community gathered about Jesus, listening to his word, proceeding toward the Easter experience, awaiting the gift of the Spirit for mission.”

And I pledge my commitment to you seminarians, a commitment to which I am challenged in *Pastores*, to be present as your bishop, through the ministry of your good rector and his collaborators, for your own apostolic love and service of Christ and his Church.

And may Mary, the patroness of this University and Seminary, under the title of Our Lady Seat of Wisdom, cherish this a house in her chaste womb. May the words of her Son, still treasured in her heart, nourish the wisdom and strength of her son, and our President-Rector Thomas Richard Hurst. And may she

guide the steps of all in this house who take part in the daily priestly offering of the Eucharistic death and resurrection of her Son, Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and praise and love every moment now and forever.