



ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY

OFFICE OF THE RECTOR

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OPENING TALK TO THE RETURNING MEN

13 August 2013

“A Year of History”

This year we are here to make history together for the greater glory of God. In this historic Year of Faith marking the 50th anniversary of Vatican II and the 20th anniversary of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we will celebrate in a number of ways our won Golden Jubilee: September 27th, our Patronal Feast, (explain celebration); October 24th Cardinal O’Brien, January 16th Cardinal Dolan, and then our annual Friends of the Seminary on February 21st.

As you have heard, we are going to be doing a great deal of construction in the course of the next 18 months. We are completing a total renovation of the Student Center (Field House) which will be done by the beginning to middle of September (explain the slow down). Then come late fall we will begin construction on two new dorm wings (shown to you on a diagram). All of the rooms will have private bathrooms and even a patio. Then we begin renovation on all of the other rooms in the 30 and 400 wings and the creation of a guest center in the 200 wing. In other words, there is a lot going on which will entail patience as we improve our campus – any pain and inconvenience will be worth it, trust me!

On a plaque going up in the corridor are the following words: “Renovation and Expansion of the Seminary on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary.” These are words I want each of us to reflect on many times this year: Renovation and Expansion. I am not just talking about the new dorms, most importantly we are talking about you, the living stones of the seminary. That is where the true renovation and expansion must occur.

Renovation – to have a new heart; renewed in the Lord; transformed by His love. This is a process of ongoing conversion, prayer, and formation in the four dimensions of our program. Your receptivity and docility to this process determine your future – open wide your hearts to Christ!

Expansion – God doesn’t just want a new heart, He wants an expanded heart and mind so that we can learn to Love like Christ; so that we can make room for others and be more selfless. To go out to the peripheries as Francis so often says. Expand your minds to learning in the classroom, in your reading and study. We cannot put God in a box, but allow Him to surprise us every day.

This is indeed a special time of grace: I invite each of you to reflect on the magnanimity of God’s graciousness to each of you in calling you to this seminary at this point in time. There is no perfect institution, rector, faculty, facility, in fact, look in the mirror and realize that each of us is imperfect and in need of healing and grace. Be grateful to God for the opportunity to be

here. Be grateful for the faculty, staff and institution that we have been given and that is entrusted to us to care for – this is your new home! A grateful heart is a contented heart. I was giving a tour to a former parishioner who is a doctor from Puerto Rico, as I was showing him our facilities and then your rooms, apologizing for their size and condition, he said to me “Father, these are extremely nice and in good condition, the men should be grateful for this opportunity and for the education they are receiving.” We do not pay for our education or our housing – what a gift (a \$400,000 gift)! Be grateful to God for the honor to be here. An attitude of entitlement is an ugly thing in anyone, but it is particularly odious in seminarians and priests. Be grateful!

New faculty introductions:

New: Msgr. Stephen Bosso, Fr. Alfredo Hernandez, Fr. Gregg Caggianelli, and Professor Catherine Brodersen (ABD Duquesne)

4 Deans: Fr. Remek (new dean of men), Fr. Hernandez (new dean of pastoral formation), Fr. Muhr, Deacon Dennis Demes

Special thanks to the Orientation Team: Student Council; Rat and Bookstore Managers: Deacon Kyle Smith, Deacon Brian Fabiszewski, Javier Barreto, Bryan Garcia, Joshua Swallows, Alex Rivera, Philip Tran, Crawford Bennett, Anthony Ustick, Jackson Reeves, Luis Flores

I want to close with an analogy that the Holy Father used recently to at World Youth Day. He told the young people that “Jesus offers us something bigger than the World Cup! [...] The church needs you, your enthusiasm, your creativity and the joy that is so characteristic of you” (28 July 2014). He told them that they need to get to there and “sweat” – they need to get “messy” as they strive to live the Gospel in the midst of the world. Athletes get up early every day, eat properly, and orient their whole lives to achieve a goal. Yankees even have to shave before they step onto the field. So brothers, train well, pray hard, study with diligence, give yourselves generously to our program. Get up on time, follow the Rule of Life, and just show up. As St. Paul writes:

“I have become all things to all, to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it. Do you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize? Run so as to win. Every athlete exercises discipline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:22-27).

We expect great things from each of you – and you should expect great things from us. Not because we are great, but because each of us is here to do God’s work, and He is great. A topic frequently arising in the talks of Pope Francis is that we are to know our weaknesses and shortcomings in order to remain humble – rooted in our truest identity as sons of God – “He who is almighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name” (Luke 1:49). The humble priest attracts others to God and not himself.

The new image of Christ crucified in St. Vincent’s Chapel reminds us of who Jesus is who came “not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). That is our image of priesthood – a man in constant conversation with the Father who in the midst of suffering offers his life daily for the salvation of souls. If you want to imitate this mystery you are in the right place, if not, then you are definitely being led elsewhere and that is what all of us

are here to discern. Be at peace, pray, do what you are supposed to do, study hard, and God will lead you on the path that He has for you.

4 housekeeping issues before I hand the meeting over to Fr. Remek:

1) Those preparing to receive Lector and Acolyte on September 22nd need to write letters to their bishops (handout) and return them to me by Wednesday evening – during the room blessing if you like.

2) If any of you are interested in the Tough Mudder this year, we need you to sign up before the end of the month. I am going to pay for the first \$80 of your registration. Xavy Castro is going to be our coordinator and can answer any questions about the 12 mile obstacle course, and tell you how to register for our team on line and then give you your reimbursement– We run it on November 3rd, and want to get another 20 + sems this year – great PR for vocations.

3) Over Spring Break, I am going to lead a mission trip to Haiti February 23rd to March 1st (at the same time Msgr. Hogan is taking a group of 20 to Rome), again I invite you to consider this opportunity. I need to know by the end of the month if you are going. The cost will be \$1,200 and that should cover everything (it may even be less, I am working on it). Juan Osorno will be our student coordinator.

4) I am giving each of you a book that many parishes and even dioceses are giving to the faithful to renew and expand their minds and hearts: *Rediscovering Catholicism*. I invite you to read it little by little as the semester goes on. It is a reminder that we must allow our faith to be stirred as we conclude the year of Faith.

Great having you with us brothers! Thank you for responding to the voice of the Good Shepherd. It is going to be a great year!