



# ST. VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY

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## RECTOR'S CONFERENCE

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### “The Munus Propheticum: Cry Out Prophet”

As we continue with the *tria munera*, the three offices of the priesthood, tonight we focus on the *munus docendi* or *propheticum* – the teaching or prophetic office. I wish to emphasize the quasi ontological priority or primacy of this *munus*. St. Paul reminds us that “faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Thus clear teaching and prophetic preaching are of absolute importance for those entrusted with this office. As the Second Vatican Council stated: “It is the first task of priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel of God to all men” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 4).

One of my favorite Spanish hymns is “*Grita Profeta*”; the refrain reminds us “*Ve por el mundo grita la gente que el amor de Dios no acaba ni la voz de Dios se pierde.*” Our vocation is to go out into the world and “cry out” prophetically of God’s love, to cry out His Truth, to be His voice which cannot be silenced.

This daunting task might initially be frightening to us. Be at peace you are in good company. From the Old Testament times, the prophets have been reluctant followers, but as God’s persistent call echoed in their hearts they could resist no more and God equipped them with the skills and message that are His own. The priest speaks with the authority/presence of Christ (*exousia*), and he should have confidence in the power of his preaching. Fr. George Aschenbrenner, S.J., wrote, “True preaching focuses, with an inspirational ring of authority, on the fire of God’s love in Jesus and springs from the priest’s whole experience of living, praying, and acting in the person of Christ [...]” (*Quickening the Fire in Our Midst*, 47).

The priest need not be afraid of preaching, however, he needs to duly prepare, and then trust that it is the Holy Spirit working through him in the powerful Liturgy of the Word that is entrusted to his ministry. He needs to be a receptive hearer of the Word and drink deeply from the font of the Scriptures. From the abundance of his heart he will speak God’s message. Grace builds on nature, and homilies need to be prepared through prayerful study and preparation, and then presented in a passionate and loving way that presents Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of our lives. There is always a link between the *munus sanctificandi* and the *munus docendi* - teaching and preaching is always directed to sanctification and salvation and most often is in the context of liturgical preaching. Regarding early Christian praxis, St. Justin Martyr reminds us: “The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader has finished, he who presides over those gathered admonishes and challenges them to imitate these beautiful things” (as cited in the *CCC* 1345). The link between worship and teaching is as old as the Church herself.

Give your *fiat* to the Father to teach and preach in His name and He will send you His Holy

Spirit – remember the old phrase, “God doesn’t call the equipped, he equips those He calls.” He has called, and we must do our part to live as credible witnesses, present the message well, have a clear vision of the signs of the times, and never forget our purpose as prophetic preachers and teachers. (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 144). “Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

Pope Francis has certainly been reminding us that the world needs credible witnesses. In order for people to hear the message, they must first see in us believable messengers, or as the Council noted of the priest that “by their exemplary behavior they lead people to glorify God” (*PO 4*). Your time in priestly formation is intended to help you learn your own idiosyncrasies and quirks (which we all have) and to strive to ensure that they don’t become obstacles to people hearing the message, or as noted by Ralph Waldo Emerson: “What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say.” Fr. Stephen Parkes reminded us that as you move into the new dorms this weekend, “the walls are virginal” - they have never heard gossip or profanity, they have not seen impurity or a lack of charity - it is our job to keep them virginal, to keep ourselves Christ-like and focused. Beware of the spiritually destructive subtleties that can sneak in to the rooms of our hearts: spiritual arrogance, harsh judgment, and narcissistic tendencies. For instance, if we keep a holy hour every day but we do not love our brother or have concern for others or take our studies seriously or fail to live evangelical simplicity according to our state in life, then we are whitewashed tombs, we are frauds (cf. Mt. 23:27). The integration of spirituality, human formation, academics, and pastoral application is the sign of the mature man that the Lord needs and is calling us all to be. In a word, we must be believable prophets if our words are to have an effect.

If faith comes through hearing, what if the faithful can’t hear you? The message must be audible, clear, and precise in order to connect with the congregation. Please work diligently on your diction, pace, tone, and use of the microphone. We may have prepared the best homily in the world, or the most inspiring RCIA class ever crafted, but if we cannot be heard or understood we have wasted everyone’s time and failed in our prophetic mission. We are called to be the very voice of God, but if our accent gets in the way, or if we speak too fast or too soft then the Voice intended to be heard falls on deaf ears. We cannot be clear enough, loud enough or slow enough – if you are, don’t worry, I will tell you – please try! The message must also be prayed over and crafted in such a way that we are conscious of always preaching Christ – we represent Him and not ourselves.

We are constantly striving to improve our preaching program; please take these homiletics courses seriously and always try to give homily preparation the time it deserves – begin by praying on Monday for the weekend delivery. This kind of prayerful and thoughtful preparation allows the Word to gestate within you and then become incarnate and efficacious in your preaching. As Pope Francis says quite frankly, “It demands that we offer ourselves and all our abilities as instruments (cf. *Rom 12:1*) which God can use. A preacher who does not prepare is not ‘spiritual’; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 145).

What do I mean by having a clear vision? Vision is always the charism of the prophets. The prophet sees the people, the culture, and the signs of the times and is able to interpret these realities to present a message that is both timeless and timely. We must know our congregation,

or as Pope Francis would say, “we must have the smell of the sheep.” Get to know the flock, their strengths and weaknesses, their virtues as well as their vices. Again Pope Francis: “The challenge of an inculturated preaching consists in proclaiming a synthesis, not ideas or detached values. [...] The difference between enlightening people with a synthesis and doing so with detached ideas is like the difference between boredom and heartfelt fervor. The preacher has the wonderful but difficult task of joining loving hearts, the hearts of the Lord and his people” (EG, 143). Knowing the culture in which we live and reading the signs of the times allows us to fulfill the prophetic office in such a way that allows us to be “in the world, but not of the world” (cf. Jn. 17:14-15). We are reminded in the scriptures that “For lack of vision my people perish” (Prov. 2:11; cf. also, Prov. 29:18 and Hos. 4:6). This is the role of the prophet – to see life as it really is and call our culture to the life giving ways of Christ.

Finally, the purpose of our teaching and preaching is to both inspire and challenge those around us. First of all we need to be reminded that the message of Christ is meant to be “Good News”. I had a homiletics professor who would shout out at the end of our homilies, “Where’s the Good News?” In other words, was Christ’s life-giving message of healing, peace, comfort, and joy at the center? Was the message of the Gospel made applicable to the lives of the people? And were the faithful encouraged and inspired to step out in their faith at work, home, and play? This does not mean that we cannot challenge them, certainly our Lord did/does (cf. Mt. 23) throughout the Gospels. Our words/His words are meant to sting consciences, stir hearts, and draw listeners from sin to action, or as they say, “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.” Ultimately each of us as preachers, who are first and foremost part of the people of God, are on a path of ongoing conversion which needs to be consistently and lovingly lived and presented so that each of us may be drawn more and more from darkness to light. Every morning the Church reminds us of our vocation as we pray the *Benedictus*. The words of Zechariah regarding his son, the precursor of the Lord, are also spoken to us daily: “*You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins*” (Luke 1:76-77). We have also been further reminded this week both on Sunday (Advent 2B) and Tuesday from the same first reading: “Go up onto a high mountain, Zion, herald of glad tidings; Cry out at the top of your voice, Jerusalem, *herald of good news! Fear not to cry out* and say to the cities of Judah: Here is your God!” (Isaiah 40:9).

Message, Vision, and Purpose – if we are able to present the message in such a way that it may be heard through our way of life, *and* by our presentation of a God-centered vision which is both inspiring and challenging, then we will be the men God needs us to be – an M.V.P. – a “most valuable player” or in our case a “most valuable priest – M.V.P. Message, Vision, and Purpose. May we all pray for the grace to be the prophet that God wants us and needs us to be.

*Has recibido un destino* (You have received a destiny) *de otra palabra más fuerte, es tu misión ser profeta* (it is your mission to be a prophet): *Palabra de Dios viviente* (the Word of God is living). *Tu irás llevando la luz en una entrega perene, que tu voz es voz de Dios, y la voz de Dios no duerme!* Your voice is the voice of God, and the voice of God must be heard. The New Evangelization demands just such teachers, preachers and prophets if the message of Christ is to be heard in our world today.

Be not afraid... *Grita Profeta* – Cry out you prophets!