

***“Thy Will be Done...
through us, inspite of us and because of us”***

***Reflections on Pastoral Leadership and Ministry
in the Church of 2010 and Beyond***

Keynote Address to the 47th Convention
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Dear Friends,
Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for the privilege of addressing this important and impressive international assembly of the National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors [NCDVD]; the Midwest Association of Theological Schools [MATS] and the Seminary Division of the National Catholic Education Association [NCEA]. Your invitation to me arrived over two years ago and I have given much thought to the theme you have chosen and the presentation I am about to give. I come to you as a member of a Religious Congregation - the Basilian Fathers – whose roots are in the diocesan priesthood of early 19th century France. Our *raison d'être* in the beginning was the formation of the local clergy in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

My reflections are based on many years of experience with those preparing for priestly ministry in the Church – in both diocesan seminaries and religious life – as well as with young priests, and those who work in seminaries, theological faculties and formation settings. In addition to working with those preparing for ministry, the experiences of teaching Sacred Scripture to candidates for ministry, of working in university chaplaincy, preaching priests' retreats, leading a World Youth Day, serving in congregational administration and heading a National Catholic Television Network in these turbulent times have offered me invaluable insights into the lives and hopes of young adults today. I have learnt much about the challenges facing those in ministry, and those whom we strive to serve.

Doing the will of the Lord

My starting point for this address is found in the homily of Pope Benedict XVI at the Mass for the Inauguration of his Petrine Ministry on April 24, 2005. In that very moving, programmatic address, Benedict XVI said: “Dear friends! At this moment there is no need for me to present a programme of governance. ...My real programme of governance is not to do my own will, not to pursue my own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history.”

Imagine Joseph Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI, one of the greatest theologians and minds of the Church, announcing to the Church and the world that he has come not to do his own will, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by the Lord, so that the Lord himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history! What powerful words to be taken to heart for each of us entrusted with priestly and pastoral ministry!

These words are very fitting for the theme of this conference in Milwaukee: “Thy will be done.” The will of God is first of all the comprehensive plan of God for the universe and history. It is the marvelous plan through which the Father, “destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5). The same expression “thy will be done” can refer also to any singular expression of the will of God. This “will” must be done first of all by God; it is God who fulfills his plan of salvation for the world.

Far from meaning some kind of passive, helpless abandonment to fate or circumstance, the “will of God” surpasses our wildest imagination and dreams, and reveals God’s immense, providential, merciful care for each and everyone of us. To allow God’s will to be done in us requires a conscious, decided “yes” or “fiat” on our part, and a sweet and sometimes bittersweet surrender so that something great may happen in us, through us, because of us and even in spite of us.

A vocation is not self-centered but comes to maturity in the context of a living, breathing, faith community. Allow me to share with you some reflections on our life together in the Church. What are the implications of doing God’s will in vocation and formation ministry in the Church today? What are the challenges and opportunities before us as we try to understand and do the will of God, and as we help the young people entrusted to us to discern God’s will for them? How is our priesthood related to the priesthood of Jesus, the eternal high priest? How is the will of God manifested to us? How is the will of God done in and through us?

I would also like to address several important questions that are surfacing among those preparing for ministry, and those recently ordained. Why are candidates for ministry and newly ordained priests raising questions about the validity and enduring significance of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council? Why does there seem to be a fascination with old liturgical practice and things that appear to be external and superficial? Why is the divide growing between younger priests and older priests? How can we foster dialogue and build bridges between the generations of the presbyterate?

The Prophetic Priesthood of Jesus Christ

Before we speak of formation for ministry and the exercise of our priestly ministry, we must look carefully at the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not a priest after the Jewish tradition. He did not belong to the line of Aaron but to that of Judah, and thus the path of priesthood was legally closed to Him. The person and activity of Jesus of

Nazareth did not follow in the line of the ancient priests, but in that of the tradition of the prophets of ancient Israel. As Pope Benedict pointed out in his homily for the Solemnity of Corpus Christi in Rome on June 3, 2010: “Jesus distanced Himself from a ritualistic conception of religion, criticizing the approach that attributed value to human precepts associated with ritual purity rather than to the observance of God's commandments; that is, to love for God and for neighbor, which 'is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices'. ... Even His death, which we Christians rightly call 'sacrifice', was completely unlike the ancient sacrifices, it was quite the opposite: the execution of a death sentence of the most humiliating kind: crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem”

Unlike the Levitical priests, the death of Jesus was essential for his priesthood. He is a priest of compassion. His authority attracts us- because of his compassion. Ultimately, Jesus exists for others, he exists to serve. He has been tested in all respects like us- he knows all of our difficulties; he is a tried man; he knows our condition from the inside and from the outside- only by this did he acquire a profound capacity for compassion. For one must have suffered in order to truly feel for others. The priesthood of Christ involves suffering. Jesus truly suffered and He did so for us. He was the Son and had no need to learn obedience, but we do, we needed it and we will always need it. Thus the Son assumed our humanity and, for us, allowed Himself to be 'educated' in the crucible of suffering, he allowed himself to be transformed by suffering, like the seed which to bring forth fruit must die in the earth. Without this fundamental principle and vision, any of our efforts to form the Church of Jesus Christ are in vain.

The lasting significance of Vatican II

When Pope Benedict met with the Roman Curia to offer his first Christmas greetings as Pope back in December 2005, he offered a long analysis of the legacy left by the 1962-1965 gathering of the world's bishops (known as the Second Vatican Council). This papal address is absolutely essential to understand what Benedict is trying to offer the Church through his Pontificate.

One of the most important duties and responsibilities of the Successor of Peter and Vicar of Christ is to preserve the unity of the Church. Benedict, in particular, feels deeply responsible for unity, and cares for those who still today find themselves outside of ecclesial communion, but also of those who find themselves in a state of tension within it, and he invites all to a reciprocal openness within the unity of the same faith... that same unity and faith which inspired John XIII fifty-one years ago to convene the Council, and moved and animated Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II in their heroic efforts to give flesh and blood to the Second Vatican Council.

Nevertheless, there have been several significant events, statements, and misunderstandings these past years that have left us all perplexed. Are we turning the clock back on Vatican II? Are we trying to erase what the Council taught? In particular, in the area of liturgy, is there an effort to go backward rather than forward? I have been concerned that among younger clergy and even those in formation, there seems to be a greater interest in and familiarity with recent “*Motu Proprios*” rather than Conciliar

documents. There appears to be a trivialization, a fastidious and affected attention to externals more than a deep desire to find meaning, and foster reverence and respect for the Sacred Liturgy.

The pillar of the renewal of priestly life is the liturgy. If the priest does not rediscover the true meaning of the liturgy in his life, he cannot find himself. The liturgy is the place of education to communion. The protagonist of the liturgy is Christ, not the Pope, the Cardinals in Rome, and not even the parish priest. By living the liturgy, we can enter into the life of God, and only thus can we priests journey effectively with the men and women of our time and of all time. Nevertheless the liturgical reform must concern itself not only with texts and ceremonies, rubrics and rituals, vestments and the number of candlesticks on altars, but also with the spiritual hungers of human communities that we serve. Without authentic evangelization, participation in the liturgy is ultimately hollow—an aesthetic pastime or a momentary palliative; without the works of justice and charity, participation in the liturgy is ultimately deceptive, playing church rather than being church.

Nor can we forget that permission for the “Extraordinary Rite” of the Mass was granted for the sake of unity in the Church and nothing else. “The Extraordinary Rite” is exactly that: extraordinary. What is ordinary is what the vast number of our faithful celebrate each week. To impose what was meant to be “extraordinary” on ordinary situations does a great disservice to the unity of the Church and goes against the intent of the Holy Father. To misuse the special permission of the Holy Father for the Extraordinary Rite for political motives causes division. We must be about the work of unity in a Church that is often so divided.

Another perplexing reality I have encountered, especially among those in formation and those newly ordained, has been in the area of Sacred Scripture and preaching. A number of students, usually in their final years of the Master of Divinity or Master of Pastoral Theology program have complained saying they would never take another Scripture course again; that their previous Scripture courses had nothing to do with the reality of the church and liturgy and that the courses were "without a soul". This topic was addressed numerous times at the recent 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, a Synod which I experienced in a very significant way, having served as the English language media attaché to this historic, world-wide gathering at the Vatican.

One cause of the present disinterest and seeming impasse in Scriptural studies has been the atomization and dissection of the Scriptures, and a lack of integration of biblical studies with faith and lived spirituality. Are today's Catholic Scripture scholars and teachers adequately prepared to draw from their exegetical knowledge and their own life of faith and prayer to help fellow Catholics discover the meaning of the biblical Word today?

In his 2001 brilliant and synthetic Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* at the close of the Great Jubilee, Pope John Paul II highlighted seven pastoral priorities that are

key to effective pastoral ministry today: holiness, prayer, Sunday Eucharist, sacrament of reconciliation, the primacy of grace, and listening to the Word and proclaiming the Word. The Word of God must be at the centre of our priestly lives and ministries. It is fundamental to the preparation of those preparing for priestly ministry. Unless we build our lives upon its rock-solid foundation, we will not have any roots.

Moving Beyond Ideology

We must be honest and admit that today, some of us are still stuck in the ideological battles that followed the Second Vatican Council. Perhaps we are frozen in categories of left and right; traditional vs. avant-garde; male vs. female; hierarchical vs. lay-led, or prophetic vs. static. Excessive tensions arising from Church politics, gender issues, liturgical practices, language, confusion over the “spirit of Vatican II” and not the whole message of the Second Vatican Council – all of these influence today's candidates for ministry in the Church. Our inter-ecclesial and inter-community fixations and polarizations on all sides of the ecclesial spectrum can distract us from addressing with requisite depth and discernment the issues facing us today.

Many of today's young adults, including young priests and those discerning or preparing for ordained ministry, are searchers and seekers who desire to be truly Catholic. They seek nourishment in piety and devotion in ways very different from our own. They engage freely and generously in the works of social justice. They refuse to allow themselves to be ensnared by political or politically correct polarization or fashionable ideologies which are ready to exploit their human potential.

Whatever is not purified and transformed within us is transmitted to others—especially to the next generation. When we sell ourselves to cynicism and despair, meanness of heart, smallness of spirit and harshness in ecclesial discourse, we betray our deepest identity as bearers of joy, hope and truth. The manifestations of the Spirit must be accompanied by positive energy—because they are liberating. They ultimately set people free, and do not lead them into depression, sadness, cynicism, indifference or anger.

We must honestly ask ourselves individually and collectively: What ideologies have dominated our lives? How do we minister beyond ideology? What have been the dominant ecclesial ideologies at work among us? Is joy present in our priestly witness? What prevents me as an individual and us as a community from giving a robust, joyful witness to Jesus Christ, the Catholic Faith and the Church?

Many of us are afraid of the new generation, of their robust sense of Catholicism, their manifestations of piety, their desire to “reclaim” many things that have been lost or forgotten. Deep down inside of many of our hearts, we would like clones of ourselves, and not new, free, thinking beings of a new age. There is a great wisdom to the Church's ban on human cloning!

The younger generation easily uses the word “solid” to describe those who are rooted in tradition and unafraid to manifest authentic piety and devotion. The younger

generation is wary of those who equivocate and speak around issues rather than addressing them. What can we learn from their questioning? We must learn that we have to avoid the temptation to fudge – to adapt the Catholic faith so as to make it palatable to modern tastes and expectations. This so-called "accommodationist" approach generally fails. There is a risk in this approach that the Christian message becomes indistinguishable from everything else on offer in the market stalls of secularized religious faith. We have to be convinced that the fullness of the truth and beauty of the message of Jesus Christ is powerfully attractive when it is communicated without apologies or compromise.

The Second Vatican Council recommends that older priests show understanding and sympathy toward younger priests' initiatives; and it advises young ones to respect the experience of older priests and to trust them; it suggests that both treat each other with sincere affection, following the example of so many priests of yesterday and today; the parish priest and other priests, including the religious, are called upon to testify to communion in everyday life.

The resurgence of triumphalism, juridicism and clericalism

Among a particular segment of the Church today, and among some of our young people preparing for ministry or recently ordained, there is a resurgence of triumphalism. The triumphalist approach would like Church leaders and pastors to exercise authority through aggressive condemnation and excommunication and believes that the Church not only has the truth but also all the answers to every modern dilemma! How many of this group would like to use a Catholic Television Network to be the voice piece for such an ecclesial view! Woe to me if I do that with Salt + Light Television!

Jesus Christ is indeed the Truth, and the fullness of that truth is found in the Roman Catholic Church, but we must seek out with humility and in light of the Gospel how to respond to the many and varied demands of living in today's world. The Church must always proclaim the truth in love and charity. We do not impose the gospel on the world, but propose its alternative vision of compelling beauty, a beauty rooted in faith and reason. We seek to persuade by grace, truth and beauty through our liturgies, our pastoral programs and teaching moments.

Recently we have received a number of requests from our younger viewers and some younger clergy to "feature" the "old vestments" on our liturgical broadcasts. A fascination with such displays is symbolic of an ongoing "restorationism" in various pockets of the Church and represents an attempt to return to a triumphal past that the young never knew. In the midst of a world-wide pandemic of sex abuse, insistence on these elements is even more disconcerting. What does this message communicate to the world around us?

Again among a particular segment of the Church today, and among some of our young people, there is a resurgence of juridicism that searches out laws new or old to justify personal positions or ideologies in the Church. Juridicists take great delight in

focusing on liturgical practices. They often create unnecessary hoops for people to jump through. While the Church needs law to insure good order, the purpose of all laws in the Church is the same as for all the works of the Church: for us, for our good and for our salvation.

There is also an emerging clericalist perspective that exaggerates the authority of the priest or bishop creating a new authoritarianism. The clericalist operates as if ordained ministers are entitled to special status and privilege in the Church and in society. It becomes even more pronounced when vocations are few, and those who are preparing for ministry and those recently ordained manifest a certain sense of entitlement because they have responded to the call while many others have not! Therefore they think that they deserve even more respect in this day and age. Clericalists gives little merit to collaboration with the laity and the involvement of laity. I encounter this on a daily basis in a pocket of our television viewers who would be content with a whole series of “talking head” priests, sisters and Church leaders who simply “talk at people” rather than engage them in mature, adult conversation.

Whenever we are manipulated by or become instruments of political pressure groups or tactics that would like to give the Church such new forms of triumphalism, juridicism, and clericalism, we fail in our mission of helping people to grow into a living, breathing, hopeful Church.

One of the great insights that came to me during the recent “Year of St. Paul” was Paul’s tremendous spirit of collaboration with his co-workers. It was not simply a personal style or political ploy imposed by necessity but flowed from the deepest experience of his faith and his theological convictions. Paul of Tarsus knew that every gift, no matter how brilliant, was subordinate to the gift of charity and the bonding of the community. This must be our approach if the church is to be renewed and our mission to the world sustained.

Our current ecclesial reality

How could I stand here before the Seminary Rectors, heads of theologates and Vocation Directors of the United States and Canada without speaking about the ways that we are being pruned as a Church community, as the presbyterate and the episcopate during these very challenging days for the world Church? Over the past year in particular, the tsunami of headlines about abuse of minors by priests and religious in Ireland, Germany, Austria and numerous other countries, and re-runs of old stories from various places have brought the Church to her knees once again. To watch television networks or read the newspapers, one would think that the sexual abuse of children is a uniquely Catholic problem, one indeed facilitated by a wicked lot of priests and bishops.

Is it not true that many of us in the Church today feel like we are caught in a flash flood that is unexpected, powerful, destructive and filled with despair? The refrain sounds all too familiar: “Vocations are down, scandals are up. Problems are more and more complex, and demands are increasing. Complaints are more frequent and more

strident. We are dealing with an aging population. We seem to have moved from “mission to maintenance.” We feel battered and bruised. The flame seems to have gone out and our influence is terribly diminished. And the list goes on and on... Many of us have been hoodwinked into discouragement.

The media exerts a powerful influence on the thinking, the attitudes and the faith of people. The flash flood bears down with immense force on all of us. Some view our present situation with great pessimism and grow disheartened, depressed, and even cynical. Others don't want to admit what is happening and go whistling in the dark, clinging to the illusion that things definitively past can be recovered and the claims and facts of the present ignored. The media, magnifying various cases of pedophilia throughout the world, have forgotten the great majority of priests and religious who have lived out and continue to live out their fidelity happily and with total and freely given dedication, and whose only goal is to seek God and do good for others.

Just as the Risen Lord entrusted himself into the hands of pathetic, broken people in the beginning, he does the same to us. The full significance of the Ascension of the Lord reminds us that Christ accepts our lack of self-confidence in ourselves. He accepts the shadowy and dark areas of our humanity. He accepts our capacity for deceit, betrayal, abuse, greed and power. And having accepted us, he calls us, gives us the eternal commission to be his people, and sends us to serve him and love him. No one has described this better than John Henry Cardinal Newman who will be proclaimed “blessed” next Sunday. Cardinal Newman wrote:

**“He calls us again and again,
in order to justify us again and again-
and again and again, and more and more,
to sanctify and glorify us.
It were well if we understood this;
but we are slow to master the great truth,
that Christ is, as it were,
walking among us, and by his hand, or eye, or voice,
bidding us follow him.”**

Five holy role models for our time

Throughout last year, we were invited to reflect on the life, message and example of St. John Vianney during the Year of the Priest. The Curé of the little village of Ars in France offered to each of us a sterling example of holiness and virtue, especially through his ministry of reconciliation. Let me offer you five exemplary models of ecclesial ministers who embody a way and message for our own times.

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman

The beatification of Cardinal Newman on Sunday September 19, 2010 in Birmingham is a very important event for the universal Church. This 19th-century

theologian is considered by many to have anticipated the Second Vatican Council. In all his anticipation he was always very careful to keep a moderate balance. He never went over the top. Rather than highlight his brilliance of theological synthesis and grasp of history, I would like to stress one of his outstanding human qualities: his understanding of friendship.

Friendship is a positive experience in a person's emotional life. In the Church there is still much fear of friendship. Pathologies are not channeled if one is not helped to develop a healthy life. Unhealthy and negative friendships, which because of this are not proper friendships, must not close us off from the essential value of these bonds of preference that open us to the love of others and help us to understand who God is. Newman truly speaks heart-to-heart – "cor ad cor loquitur" – a phrase that he took from St. Francis de Sales, as his personal motto.

Cardinal Newman often wrote to his friends as *carissimi* – "dearest ones" – but his was a more innocent age, far less suspicious of strong expressions of love between persons of the same sex. Newman was not afraid to be very close to a few people. He once wrote in a letter: "The best preparation for loving the world at large, and loving it duly and wisely is to cultivate an intimate friendship and affection for those who are immediately about."

Are we able to foster such friendships today among priests and among the people we serve? Can such intimate friendships exist for us? Men and women often have intense friendships with members of their own sex, friendships that have no sexual component; yet we are at a loss to speak about them or even afraid to do so. Today "friend" is one you add to a social networking profile on the web. You can "friend" someone or "unfriend" them with the stroke of your keyboard. "Friend" is also a euphemism for a sexual partner outside marriage. Can a man nowadays even own up with pride to having a dear and close friend, another man to whom he is devoted?

The French writer François Mauriac once wrote about friendship: "If you are friends with Christ many others will warm themselves at your fire... On the day when you no longer burn with love, many will die of the cold." I am certain that the "kindly light" and flame in Cardinal Newman's heart gave and continues to give life and warmth to millions of people. And the source of the unquenchable fire was Newman's deep friendship with Jesus Christ. We need Newman's kindly light and brilliant example today more than ever.

Blessed John XXIII

In 1958, at nearly 77 years old, Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was elected Pope upon the death of Pius XII. He was expected by many to be a caretaker and transitional Pope, but he astonished the Church and the world with his energy and reforming spirit. He expanded and internationalized the college of cardinals, called the first diocesan synod of Rome in history, revised the Code of Canon Law, and called the Second Vatican Council

with the specific purpose of renewing the life of the Church and its teachings and reuniting Christians throughout the world.

In his opening address on October 11, 1962 [the date established as his feast and not the customary date of one's death], at the beginning of the Vatican Council, Pope John said, "In the every day exercise of our pastoral ministry, greatly to our sorrow we sometimes have to listen to those who, although consumed with zeal, do not have very much judgment or balance. To them the modern world is nothing but betrayal and ruination. They claim that this age is far worse than previous ages and they go on as though they had learned nothing from history – and yet history is the great teacher of life."

On that same night of October 11, 1962, the day of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Papa Giovanni appeared at his window in answer to the chanting and singing below from a crowd estimated at half a million people assembled in St. Peter's square. Many were young people who came in procession with candles and singing. His impromptu window speech that night is now part of Rome's legends. He cried out to the crowd:

"Carissimi giovani, carissimi giovani, Dear children, I hear your voice." In the simplest language, he told them about his hopes for the Council. He pointed out that the moon, up there, was observing the spectacle. "My voice is an isolated one," he said, "but it echoes the voice of the whole world. Here, in effect, the whole world is represented." He concluded: "Tornando a casa ... As you return to your homes, give your little children a kiss -- tell them it is from Pope John."

The emotion was palpable. The "patriarch" who was bearing the burden of age and sickness, gave and generated love with all his being. For all of the lofty words, words, words and texts that went into the Council, the historic nocturnal gathering on October 11, 1962 – the opening night of Vatican II – was infused with the deep and stirring humanity of its author.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli was a human being, more concerned with his faithfulness than his image, more concerned with those around him than with his own desires. He truly embodied the words, "not my will but Your will be done." With an infectious warmth and vision, he stressed the relevance of the Church in a rapidly changing society and made the Church's deepest truths stand out in the modern world.

Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko, Martyr for the Truth

The recent beatification of the Polish Priest and Martyr, Jerzy Popieluszko offers us a magnificent model of courage, boldness, conviction and faith. He was born on this very day, September 14, 1947, the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, in the village of Okopy in eastern Poland.

August 1980, saw the beginning of the Solidarity trade union. Fr. Jerzy regularly attended the trials of Solidarity activists, sitting prominently in court with their families so that the prisoners could see they were not forgotten. Jerzy was neither a social nor a political activist, but a Catholic priest. He wasn't a forceful speaker, but someone of deep conviction and integrity. His sanctity lay in fundamental righteousness that gave people hope even in horrendous situations. He knew that all totalitarian systems are based on terror and intimidation. The Communists saw him as an enemy because he freed people from fear of the system.

On October 19, 1984, he was kidnapped by security agents on his way back to Warsaw after a visit to a neighboring town. He was savagely beaten until he lost consciousness and his body was tied up in such a way that he would strangle himself by moving. His weighted body was then thrown into a deep reservoir. The massive turnout of people for his funeral sent shock waves deep into the Communist establishment.

The blood of his martyrdom has become the seed of faith for his homeland and for the church. At this moment in history, when the priesthood and the church have suffered much because of the past "sins of the fathers," the life and death of Fr. Popieluszek remind us what the priesthood and the Roman Catholic Church are all about.

The Servant of God, Fr. Michael McGivney

Fr. Michael McGivney, a parish priest in Hartford, Connecticut lived in 19th century America. He ministered to his flock with Christ-like compassion and recognized the material and spiritual poverty of so many members of the Catholic community of his day. He understood that it was part of the lay vocation to become actively involved in offering assistance to brothers and sisters in need. He knew that it is not only priests and religious who have a vocation, but that every Christian is called by Christ to carry out a particular mission in the Church. He died at the young age of 38 years old, leaving a lasting legacy in founding and establishing the Knights of Columbus, a lay Catholic fraternal organization that now has close to 1.8 million members worldwide.

Like the Good Samaritan, Christ's care for the sick and the suffering was an inspiration to Fr. McGivney who, as a priest, sought to be a living sign of Christ for the people he served. Fr. McGivney and his brother Knights throughout history have been binding the wounds of those they discovered lying by the wayside of history and helping restore them to health and strength. In so doing, they imitate Christ, who came that we might have life in abundance.

St. André of Montreal – Brother André Bessette, CSC

The last example I hold up for you is not a priest but a Brother of Holy Cross, André Bessette, C.S.C. Born Alfred Bessette on August 9, 1845, in Saint-Grégoire d'Iberville, Quebec, he was one of 12 children and suffered from a chronic stomach ailment that kept him out of school and often without work. A few years after his father's death, his mother died, but their piety and trust in God had deeply influenced young

Alfred. When he reached the age of 18, he set out for New England in search of employment. He spent four years working in cotton mills and farms in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. In 1867 he returned to Canada and sought the help of his childhood parish priest, Father André Provençal. The priest encouraged the young man to pursue his desire to enter into religious life.

When Alfred entered the novitiate, Father Provençal sent a letter to the novice master saying, "I am sending a saint to your congregation." The Holy Cross brothers had initially turned the less than five-foot-tall André away from seeking a religious vocation because of his delicate health. In reference to his assignment as doorman, he once quipped, "When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door."

For more than 40 years, André contented himself with his humble tasks of welcoming visitors, cleaning the premises and running errands. He put himself at the service of everyone, especially the students, whom he would look after when they were ill. Many visitors would come to the college and ask André to pray for their loved ones who were ill, and many claimed they had been healed. News of his power to heal spread as people began to recover. In response to the many healings and conversions, Brother André would always insist it was the work of St. Joseph, not himself.

Brother André's special affection for St. Joseph inspired him to build a church in his honor. Using the small sums he received cutting students' hair, as well as donations, the brother was able to build a modest structure in 1904, which he continued to expand as more funding became available. Brother André was named the oratory's custodian in 1909 as hundreds and then thousands of pilgrims made their way to Mount Royal to meet Brother André and pray to St. Joseph. Brother André died on January 6, 1937, at the age of 91. Between his death and burial, more than 1 million people came to pay tribute to him. Beatified in 1982 by Pope John Paul II, Brother André, the humble porter of Mount Royal will be proclaimed a saint on October 17, 2010 in Rome.

Brother André Besette is a gentle yet powerful witness who reminds us that in the midst of all of our pastoral endeavors, we must strive for humility, practice hospitality, and love the poor. Who can say why was André chosen? In a truly beautiful circular letter to the Holy Cross family earlier this year, former Holy Cross Superior General Fr. Hugh Cleary, CSC wrote: "But perhaps André was chosen, like Mary and Joseph, because in the eyes of this world he was no one; he possessed nothing, nothing possessed him."

What struck me forcefully in the story of Brother André was the intuition and wisdom of his parish priest, Fr. André Provençal, who encouraged the young Alfred to pursue his desire to enter into religious life. Fr. Provençal sent a letter to the novice master saying, "I am sending a saint to your congregation."

I hope and pray that we who have been entrusted with vocational promotion and seminary formation may never forget one of the most important duties we have: to discern, recognize and acknowledge holiness in the young men entrusted to us. We must

be discerners of holiness, fishers of men and not keepers of aquariums. Our task is not only to teach and form future ministers, but to call forth saints for the new millennium.

Holiness is the calling card of the Church. It is the face of the Church as we have seen in the remarkable lives of Jean Marie Vianney of Ars, John Henry Newman of Birmingham, Angelo Roncalli of Sotto il Monte and the Vatican, Jerzy Popieluszko of Warsaw, Michael McGivney of Hartford, and André Bessette of Montreal. Each of these men did not get caught up in the quarrels, squabbles and passing things of their age. They based their lives on God's Word, immersed themselves in the liturgy of the Church, drew strength from the Eucharist and the Sacraments, and put their devotion into practice through clear teaching, compassionate loving, gentle yet firm shepherding, patient suffering, and generously serving the poor. They allowed God's will to be done in their lives on a daily basis. The Lord worked through their doubts, strengths and human weaknesses to unite the Church. Their action on Jesus' behalf was all very positive, hopeful, courageous, and straightforward. Their active faith in him and their decisive following of him are the unchanging quintessence of the Church's vocation. They are the real heroes and role models for those who wish to serve the Lord in ordained ministry and religious life today.

The Lord entrusted himself into our hands

Priesthood is not, first and foremost, something we do, but someone we are. It is not an earned trophy. It is about an intimate relationship to the vine who is Christ. The Character of Christ the High Priest is branded on our hearts. We must never imagine that it is ourselves alone, in new-found power and privilege, who accomplish saving actions. It is Jesus, the Christ, who baptizes and preaches and spreads the feast of His body and blood and provides for the helpless and heals the hurt and grants us peace. He does it though weak, human beings like you and me. Who of us can ever be worthy of such a great calling? To victims, we must be an advocate; for the aimless, we must be shepherds; for the disheartened, heralds of good news; for sinners, disturbers of conscience; and for the guilty, forgivers. Let us take heart and be encouraged by the witness of the apostles and martyrs of the Early Church and the contemporary Church and never be afraid of giving our lives whole-heartedly to the Lord of the harvest. We come not to do our will but the will of the One who has called us and sent us.

Let me leave you with the deeply moving words of Pope John Paul II in his final homily at Canada's 2002 World Youth Day in Toronto. This great ecclesial event was prepared and took place under the terrible shadow of the sex-abuse crisis that erupted in the USA in early 2002. The Holy Father's words were so important and consoling then as they are today:

“Even a tiny flame lifts the heavy lid of night. How much more light will you make, all together, if you bond as one in the communion of the Church! If you love Jesus, love the Church! Do not be discouraged by the sins and failings of some of her members. The harm done by some priests and religious to the young and vulnerable fills us all with a deep sense of sadness and shame.”

“But think of the vast majority of dedicated and generous priests and religious whose only wish is to serve and do good! There are many priests, seminarians and consecrated persons here today; be close to them and support them! And if, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the same call to the priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road of the Cross! At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit...”

May our will always be the will of the one who sent us: Jesus the Good Shepherd. Our real program of governance and pastoral ministry is not to pursue our own ideas, but to listen, together with the whole Church, to the word and the will of the Lord, to be guided by Him, so that He himself will lead the Church at this hour of our history. May God's will be done in us, through us, in spite of us, and yes, even because of us.

Thank you.

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