

# Homily for Centennial Mass of Notre Dame Seminary

September 16, 2023

Very Reverend Joshua J. Rodrigue, Rector-President

Archbishop Aymond, Most Reverend Fathers, former Rectors, brother priests, deacons, men and women religious, seminarians, faculty, staff, benefactors, brothers and sisters in Christ, thank you for joining us as we celebrate the centennial of Notre Dame Seminary.

Whether its driving down St. Charles Avenue, Magazine Street, Esplanade or any of the older streets of New Orleans, one passes by many homes—some small and simple, some large and grand. Most all have been in the city for a long period of time. Some have passed from generation to generation in the same family, others have exchanged one family for another over the years. While families and members of families have come and gone from these homes throughout the centuries, the buildings have provided the same purpose—a place of shelter, a place of security, a place of learning, a place of growing up, a place of hoping, a place for dreaming, a place of experiencing sorrow, a place of receiving comfort, a place of loving, and a place of being loved.

And today, we come in this venerable home for the people of faith of New Orleans to celebrate the centennial of one of her daughter homes—of Notre Dame Seminary, which has been the home for thousands of young men studying for the priesthood over the century and for many here today. Because of the numbers who have come to rejoice in this milestone in the history and life of Notre Dame Seminary, we would not have been able to celebrate in our own chapel, but there could be no more fitting place than here where a number of you *truly* finished your time at Notre Dame Seminary, here through your ordination.

I speak of Notre Dame Seminary today as a home, because it is in the home that vocations truly begin; it is in the home at Nazareth where our Lord experienced the school of Mary and Joseph; and from the Gospel today, it is in the home of John that the beloved disciple finished his formation in the same school of Mary. From the years of formation with Jesus, John learned his teaching and the Gospel way of life. But in taking Mary into his home, would not the beloved disciple have learned more about the Lord he loved, the hours of hearing from

Mary what Jesus was like as a boy, the stories of him living in the home at Nazareth? It's how we often come to know more about someone, from their parents. I saw a number of you seminarians last night speaking to my parents, trying to find out stories about me growing up. Trust me, my life was probably not as interesting as the Lord's life growing up. But would not Mary, who knew her Son best of all, give more insight into her Son's teachings and way of life to John. Perhaps that is a reason John's Gospel is so rich as compared to the other three Gospels.

And it is in our seminary-home dedicated to Our Lady where our seminarians, our deacon candidates, our lay students have come over the century to be formed both in the school of Mary and more importantly in the school of her son, Jesus Christ. Pope Francis, in an address to seminarians, explained, "I like to imagine the Seminary as the family of Nazareth, in which Jesus was welcomed, cared for and trained in view of the mission entrusted to him by the Father. The Son of God agreed to let himself be loved and guided by human parents, Mary and Joseph, teaching each of us that without docility no one can grow and mature."<sup>1</sup>

It is in the house of Our Lady, of Notre Dame Seminary where future priests have been called over the century to learn more about the Lord whom we love, to be drawn into a greater understanding and way of life in learning the teachings of Christ and spending time in prayer to come to know not just about Christ but to know Jesus Himself, *personally*.

The prophet Isaiah today reminds us of what has happened over the century within the walls of Notre Dame Seminary. He says, "Their holocausts and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." At the heart of our seminary in her chapel, the hundreds of thousands of Masses, of *holocausts and sacrifices*, offered upon the altars in our chapel, have been acceptable to our Lord. The millions of hours of prayer from those who enter her doors for themselves, for others, for the Church. The countless people, innumerable intentions remembered in prayer before the Lord in our house of prayer.

Isaiah also says, "I will... make them joyful in my house of prayer." The heaviness of wrestling with and discerning their vocation to the priesthood gives way to the joy of truly encountering the reality of the Lord's comforting presence

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<sup>1</sup> Addressed to the community of the Pontifical Pius XI Regional Seminary of Ancona, June 10, 2021.

to the seminarian and the clarity in discernment. It is not just the chapel that is designated a house of prayer, but the seminary itself is a house of prayer. Throughout the day, throughout the building, her seminarians, her people encounter Christ. For prayer is not just an end in itself, but is a means to and end, it is the very person of Christ that we encounter. It is the way He reveals Himself through our interactions with one another, the insights we gain from our studies, and the moments of silence in our rooms, in our chapel. At the end of a long day of classes, pastoral assignments, exercise, battling the pot holes and traffic of New Orleans, resting in the peace and security of home at the seminary, makes us joyful in the Lord's house of prayer.

And it is at Notre Dame Seminary, in this house of prayer that Isaiah reminds us that seminarians "join themselves to the LORD, ministering to him, loving the name of the LORD." Day by day for a hundred years, seminarians have grown in intimacy and union with God being invited to become one with the Lord. Seminarians have ministered to the Lord in serving Him directly at His altar and indirectly through their brothers and sisters. In the countless hours of prayer and encounter, seminarians have come to love the name of the Lord and be loved by the One who has called them by name.

And so why? Why has the Lord called thousands of men by name to Notre Dame Seminary to study, to be formed, to encounter Christ? Why have hundreds of lay men and women been educated and formed and encountered Christ at Notre Dame Seminary? Why have over a thousand seminarians finished their studies and formation at Note Dame Seminary to be ordained priests after the shepherd's heart of Jesus Christ? Why has the Lord called into existence one hundred years ago Notre Dame Seminary? It's a simple answer.

Simply to continue the saving mission of Jesus Christ as he commanded at the end of Matthew's Gospel, to form priests, to form lay leaders to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you".<sup>2</sup> As we heard in the Acts of the Apostles, "And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim." Priests, seminarians, lay men and women formed at Notre Dame Seminary speak in different tongues, in different ways according

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<sup>2</sup> (28:19-20)

to their state in life to proclaim the Gospel message of salvation to a world in need of it.

Like the old homes of New Orleans where generations of families have come and gone and will continue to come and be formed within their timeworn walls, Notre Dame Seminary, under the watchful care of Our Blessed Mother and the love of our Lord, where generations of seminarians have come and gone and where seminarians and lay students will continue to come and be formed within her timeworn walls, Notre Dame Seminary has been here for 100 years, and please God, she will be here for future centuries.

While the faces of our faculty and seminarians have changed over the past century, our primary mission at Notre Dame Seminary has remained the same—to form the minds and hearts of seminarians to become priests who have the heart of Christ, the Good Shepherd, and who will pastor the Lord's flock with love and compassion. We give thanks to our God for gracing our city and our church with so wonderful a seminary, and we ask through the intercession of Our Lady for the seminary under her care, that God will continue to bless our endeavors for centuries to come. *Deus providebit ad multos annos.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *God will provide for many years.* The motto of Notre Dame seminary is *Deus Providebit*, taken from Archbishop Shaw's episcopal coat of arms.