

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
THURSDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF EASTER
SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL REGIONAL SEMINARY
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My Dear Brothers in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, it is a joy to be able to celebrate Mass with you this morning and to again greet you in the name of the Holy Father and to assure you of his prayers. I want to thank Msgr. Toups and the seminary faculty for their hard work and dedication in accompanying you throughout this year and all your years of formation. Being a seminary formator is difficult work and often goes unrecognized, but it is some of the most important work of the Church today.

The faculty and formation team have been accompanying you on your journey to priesthood, but this idea of accompaniment is not something new, even if we hear the term more frequently during the Pontificate of Pope Francis. We find it in the Scriptures. In our First Reading today from Acts, we hear how Philip the Deacon accompanies the Ethiopian Eunuch.

Yesterday, we heard about Philip. After the martyrdom of Stephen, a great persecution broke out, and many of the disciples were scattered. Even a persecution could not stifle the Spirit of God and the Gospel. Philip performed many miracles, casting out demons and healing the sick, both signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God, thus bringing great joy to the people. The forces bent on dominating the early Church and silencing the Gospel were overcome by the power of God.

The same is true even in our day. Although it seems like the disciples are scattered and the priesthood is under attack from both visible and invisible forces, the Spirit of God, whose first work is that of conversion, finds a way to help the Church proclaim the Gospel. I suppose that is why so many of you are here even in these challenging times. God is calling you to bring great joy to the people, and you are doing your best to respond to that call.

Returning to Philip, he headed from Jerusalem to Gaza. While journeying, he encountered the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was in his carriage reading the prophet Isaiah and who could not understand the Prophet Isaiah. The Ethiopian Eunuch asks a sincere question, *"How can I understand unless someone instructs me?"*

It is an important question, because it highlights the ordinary way in which people come to faith. No one can give faith by himself, and no one can understand the Scriptures (rightly) without the help of the community of faith, that is, the Church. The Ethiopian desired to understand what he was reading, and he invited Philip, who had already been prompted by the Spirit, to get in his chariot and to sit beside him. Thus, Philip began, beginning with the scripture from Isaiah, to instruct him and to proclaim Jesus to him, leading the eunuch to faith and a request for baptism.

Here we see a method for evangelization: openness to the Spirit (on the part of Philip); followed by drawing near to another, even a foreigner or stranger; appreciating the sincere desire, journey, and thirst for knowledge of God; engaging in dialogue, even a particularly religious and Christian dialogue, which culminates in the request for the gift of faith through baptism.

But, as the Fathers of the Church would say, "*Nemo potest dare quod non habet*. One cannot give what one does not have." You must have knowledge of the faith, through serious study in the seminary, and must have knowledge of God, by doing theology on your knees. Along with developing the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of your life, it is necessary to grow in the human dimension, understanding the desires of the human heart and growing in your own self-awareness and in the awareness of the human condition. Finally, your formation should lead to pastoral activity, including the work of evangelization, providing an authentic response to the desire of each person for the true, the good, and the beautiful, which have their origin in God and lead to God. A seminary helps you to integrate these dimensions. In turn, you must accept the responsibility of taking your formation seriously, accompanying one another now, so that you may accompany others on the journey of faith after your ordination and hand on the gift of faith.

Part of the art of accompaniment involves drawing close to the people, so that they may know, through you, the closeness of God. The Holy Father never ceases to speak about the necessity of having the "smell of the sheep". The priesthood is not about being mere functionary or bureaucrat. The art of accompaniment involves helping people understanding the meaning of their lives and experiences in and through the Scriptures and the Tradition.

The method modeled by Philip is none other than that which Jesus showed to his disciples, not only during His three years of public ministry, but also after His Resurrection. Here, I am thinking about the journey of the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Jesus drew near to them in their hopelessness, when they were unable to understand the events of His Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection. He explained to them the Scriptures and how they came to be fulfilled. As their hearts burned within them, they requested that He remain with them. He remained with them, and they came to know Him in the Breaking of the Bread.

What a difference accompaniment makes! It turns despair into hope, and sadness into joy! This is the reason the Church needs you and why your vocations are so close to the heart of the Holy Father. He dreams of a missionary Church, a Church that goes forth to bring the joy of the Gospel to the men and women of our day. The Ethiopian Eunuch received that which Philip proposed and which God allowed him to receive, and thus, he asked for baptism – new life.

How many in our world today need the life that Christ offers? How many need His authoritative Word to find their way? The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, helps others to understand this Word, which in turn, leads to recognizing Him in the Breaking of the Bread. In the Gospel, Jesus reveals Himself as *the Bread of Life*, the *living Bread come down from heaven*. He promises that *whoever eats this Bread will live forever*, and the Bread that he will give is *His Flesh for the Life of the World*.

This is also another reason why the Church needs you. In article 1324 of the Catechism, we find these words: "For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch." However, the priesthood is the means by which this gift of God's very life comes to us.

Jesus will continue the Bread of Life discourses. Tomorrow you will hear the people say, "*This is a hard saying, who can stand it?*" On Saturday, people will walk away, and Jesus will turn to His disciples and ask, "*Will you also walk away?*"

Simon Peter will speak for the first time in John's Gospel, and he will say, "*Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life.*"

Even today, the Successor of Saint Peter invites you to go to the Lord Jesus and to be taught by Him. He accompanies you now, as do your formators, so that you may accompany others, bringing them the gift of faith through the proclamation of the Gospel, leading them to new life through the waters of baptism, and nourishing them with the Holy Eucharist – His Flesh for the Life of the World.