

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
SOLEMN VESPERS FOR THE INSTALLATION OF
THE REVEREND STEVEN P. BESEAU AS 17TH PRESIDENT/RECTOR OF
THE PONTIFICAL COLLEGE JOSEPHINUM
MEMORIAL OF SAINT THERESE LISIEUX, VIRGIN AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2019

Your Excellencies, Father Beseau, Reverend Fathers and members of the faculty, members of the Board of Trustees, representatives of local seminaries, colleges, and universities, deacons, religious, seminarians and benefactors, as Chancellor of the Pontifical College Josephinum, I am happy to be here with you for this celebration of Solemn Vespers. As the Apostolic Nuncio, I bring you the warm greetings of the Holy Father, expressing his spiritual closeness and heartfelt congratulations not only to Father Beseau but to this seminary on this occasion.

In a short while, we will witness the dignified installation of Father Beseau as the Rector/President of this institution. It is fitting that we do so on the memorial of St. Thérèse, who loved priests and missionaries. Recalling her total consecration and commitment to her Beloved, we also honor her as a Doctor of the Church. After all, a seminary should be a house of wisdom, learning, and formation in the life of grace.

Father Beseau, as Rector and President of the Pontifical College Josephinum, a great responsibility is entrusted to you. Pope Francis has said that:

“They (seminarians) are uncut diamonds, to be formed both patiently and carefully, respecting the conscience of the individual, so that they may shine among the People of God.” (Pope Francis, Address to the Plenary of the Congregation for the Clergy, 3 October 2014)

It is your task to help these uncut diamonds show forth the brilliance of Christ. Fortunately, you do not have to do it alone. Collaborating with the formation faculty, professors, and staff, you will, with God’s help, focus your efforts on carrying out the mandate of the new *Ratio Fundamentalis*:

“The fundamental idea is that Seminaries should form missionary disciples who are ‘in love’ with the Master, shepherds ‘with the smell of the sheep’, who live in their midst to bring the mercy of God to them. Hence, every priest should always feel that he is a disciple on a journey, constantly needing an integrated formation, understood as a continuous configuration to Christ.” (Congregation for Clergy, “*The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*,” 8 December 2016, Introduction, 3).

To truly fall ‘in love’ with the Divine Master, demands spending time with him in prayer. As spiritual father to this community, you must lead these men by example, dedicating yourself to prayer in pursuit of holiness. In this, the Little Way of St. Thérèse will surely help you. The key is simply remembering that holiness involves acknowledging our littleness and God’s greatness. The day that we become poor and small or that we present ourselves to God with the same attitude as the Little Flower is the day that we will be approaching sanctity. Holiness does not consist in our virtues; rather, it is a gift of God to us.

Blessed Marie-Eugene of the Child Jesus, an expert in Teresian spirituality, writes:

“We so easily confuse holiness with heroism. We would like to be heroes and to assure the success of our physical or intellectual powers or in either case the success of our human, natural powers. In battle, the hero is the one who conquers; the saint is the one who lets God conquer in him. This is the difference. We are holy when God does all within us; we are only perfect children when God guides and enlightens us, when we give him a perfectly free hand.” (Blessed Marie-Eugene of L’Enfant Jesus, *Under the Torrents of His Love*, 47.)

To be conquered by God means to really know Him, and this requires nurturing our friendship with him in silent prayer and being faithful to our prayer even when we do not receive consolation. As the Holy Father says, “The culture of mercy is shaped in assiduous prayer.” (cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et Misera*, 20 November 2016, 20)

In prayer, even without feeling or understanding, we place ourselves in contact and communion with Him, without always having an awareness of the love and light that we are receiving. Sometimes we are tempted to abandon prayer because of spiritual dryness or to dedicate ourselves to more and more physical activities because we do not experience His closeness. It is here that you must also model the virtue of faith to this community. We show our faithfulness by adhering to God. The *Catechism* (2609) defines faith as “a filial adhesion to God, above and beyond that which we feel or understand.”

Those in this community must recognize their own sonship in relation to the Father of Mercies, and in turn persevere in prayer and in their vocations, even in these difficult times. The Little Flower stressed the importance of perseverance, for God will give His light at the right time:

“At every instant the Lord guides me, inspires that which I must say or do. I discover, right in the moment when I need to, the light that I had not previously seen; more often than not, it is not during prayers that these lights are abundant, but rather during daily work.”

What Thérèse describes is the need for discernment, and that is what the Holy Father is asking of you: to form these future priests to be men of discernment. Pope Francis, addressing seminarians, said:

“At this point it is important to grow in the habit of discernment, which allows them to value every motion and moment, even that which seems in opposition and contradictory, and to sift out what comes from the Spirit, a grace that we should ask for on our knees. Only from this foundation ... will they be able to train others in that discernment that leads to Resurrection and Life.” (Pope Francis, Audience with the community of the Pontifical Spanish College of San José, 1 April 2017)

Discernment demands having faith in God, the means by which we unite ourselves to Jesus, who transforms us by his power. This same faith is the means for spreading His Mercy to others. Prayer opens us to relying on God’s power to make His Mercy known. Thus, Thérèse could sing:

“‘Tis heaven to have the power, great grace from Christ to win for Holy Mother Church,
... for every soul on earth that he may enter in, enflame our sinful hearts, and grant us
joy and cheer. All things my love can gain when, heart to heart, I pray, alone with Jesus

Christ in speechless ecstasy. Beside His altar blest with Him I gladly stay, Oh, this is heaven for me!" (Saint Thérèse, Poem 32, str. 2)

Just as Thérèse wanted to win many souls for God, so too it must be your task to offer these seminarians an integral formation so that they can be priests and missionary disciples, helping to fulfill the dream of Pope Francis for a missionary Church. You are forming these men, by and large, for parish ministry – for service to the People of God.

They will not be able to remain forever in the rarified air of this seminary; rather, they must bring the fruits of contemplation into the world. Saint Thérèse often learned what it was she was to say or do in daily activity. It was not enough for her merely to be united to Jesus in prayer. The Little Flower was quite clear when she wrote that "*love is proven by works.*" (cf. manuscript B, 4r (257)).

You must guide this community by word and example to see the true demands of love, that is, of pastoral charity. As *Pastores dabo vobis* (23) says, "The essential content of pastoral charity is the total gift of self to the Church."

This self-giving is what makes us pleasing in the sight of God – to do even the littlest works with great love. Certainly, Christ the Good Shepherd gave Himself for His flock, enduring His Passion, out of great love. His pastoral charity continues in the Eucharistic sacrifice, which stands at the "root and center of the whole life of a priest." (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14)

The priestly ministry is filled with many tasks, important ones and insignificant ones, but these will only be fruitful if they are completed with humble love. The fruitfulness of your ministry here at the Josephinum will not be measured by the number of seminarians or the financial status of the institution; rather, the fruitfulness will be measured by that which is not always seen: the quality of the love and of the faith that accompanies your good works. Only in this way will you and those around you truly experience the joy of the priesthood.

Presbyterorum Ordinis (11) demands that priests show forth a "spirit of service and paschal joy," which is discovered first and foremost in contemplating the love of God come down to earth. You have been called to hand on the fruits of your contemplation with these your spiritual sons. To you, I recommend following the path of the *Little Way*; therefore, I commend you to the intercession of St. Thérèse, offering you my heartfelt congratulations and the Apostolic Blessing of the Holy Father as you begin your mission as Rector and President of the Pontifical College Josephinum.