

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES**  
**MONDAY OF THE 29<sup>TH</sup> WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE, WASHINGTON, DC**  
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I am very happy to be with all of you here at the Theological College as you continue to celebrate this centennial year of its founding. I wish to express my gratitude to Father Gerald McBrearity, your Rector, as well as to the faculty and staff of the Theological College, not only for their gracious invitation, but also for their important work in forming future ministers for the Church. As the representative of the Holy Father in this country, I wish to express the greetings, closeness, and spiritual affection of His Holiness Pope Francis to all gathered here, especially to the seminarians, who have responded so generously to the call of the Lord to serve His people.

To gain insight into today's Gospel, taken from Saint Luke, it is important to think about the context of the passage. Jesus has been journeying through cities and villages. In his journey among the people, He healed the centurion's servant and restored to life the only son of a widow. Along the way, He extolled the virtues of the woman who loved much and who did not cease to kiss his feet and to bathe them with her tears. Afterward, Jesus turned his face resolutely toward Jerusalem, the Holy City, and continued on his mission, telling the story of the Good Samaritan and stopping at the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. All of this happened prior to our Gospel passage. Why is this important?

First, it helps us to remember, especially as priests and future priests, that we, along with the whole People of God, journey together, as missionary disciples, toward the new and eternal Jerusalem. It allows us to reflect on the blessing of our own vocations and the gift of being called to journey with Jesus and with His flock.

This idea of journeying also points to the journey toward heaven. This image of the Church, taken up by the Second Vatican Council, is that of the People of God as a "pilgrim Church", journeying toward the heavenly Jerusalem. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 8 teaches that "in the earthly liturgy, by the way of foretaste, we share in that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, and in which Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle."

Second, as we journey with Jesus through the Scriptures, we notice that Jesus is a missionary. He does not stay at home, waiting for others to come to him; rather, He is a model for the Church that goes forth. He is out among the people, Jews and Gentiles alike, proclaiming the Kingdom of His Father, offering them hope and mercy. The new *Ratio Fundamentalis*, which deals with seminary formation, says:

"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).

Keeping the figure of Christ before our eyes, whether it is Christ preaching or healing among the people or Christ Crucified and abandoned, is important for those who will be configured to Him. In today's Gospel, the Lord assumes the role of Teacher *par excellence*. Refusing to enter into a squabble over inheritance, Jesus, like a good teacher, draws his students, his disciples, to look beyond earthly wealth to things that are eternal, warning them *to guard against every form of greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions*.

Jesus is more concerned with the eternal happiness of his disciples than settling disputes over money and property. It is not that these things are bad, but when they become an end in themselves, they risk become the treasure of our hearts rather than God. The parable of the rich fool illustrates his point. You know all too well how American society values wealth and influence; at the same time, the country seems plagued by a true spiritual poverty, a real suffering which God is calling you to relieve. When the focus is material wealth rather than God, quickly we forget both God and man, made in His image. Pope Francis laments:

We have created new idols. The worship of the ancient golden calf (cf. Ex 32:1-35) has returned in a new and ruthless guise in the idolatry of money and an impersonal economy lacking a truly human purpose. The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; man is reduced to one of his needs alone: consumption (*Evangeli Gaudium*, 55)

Jesus wants His disciples to recognize that they were made for something more than consumption – than *eating, drinking, and being merry*. A person consumed with material goods and personal well-being can quickly become self-referential. The Lord reminds His disciples that they were made for more than consumption. They were made for the infinite – for communion with God and heaven itself. This is why poverty and simplicity of life are so important!

It is Pope Francis' belief that authentic witness starts with the simplicity of life of the priest, offering credibility to his witness. Certainly, this was the case for Father Primo Mazzolari who is called the "parish priest of Italy" and whose tomb Pope Francis recently visited. He encouraged his brother priests "to listen to the world, to those who live and work in it, to take on every question of meaning and hope, without fear of passing through deserts and areas of darkness. In this way, we can become a poor Church for and with the poor, the Church of Jesus."

This is what the Holy Father expects of priests today! Poverty and simplicity of life help the Church focus on her mission and on what is eternal – salvation! They help the Church to be the Church of Jesus rather than of the world. They witness to the God, who made us rich by His poverty.

A seminary is a place for you to learn these important lessons and to grow in wisdom. It is my prayer that here, as you celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Theological College, you may become truly wise and rich *in what matters to God!*