

Homily, Fr. James Lyke, O.F.M.
SVD Centenary
Thanksgiving,
Bishop Joseph Francis
September 12, 1976

"And you, who do you say that I am"

Mark 8:28

Isaiah 50:4-9
James 2:14-18
Mark 8:27-35

Introduction

Fr. Donaghey, let me thank you and the other Provincials of the Society of the Divine Word, for inviting me to preach today. It is an honor that I will always cherish.

Above all, let me congratulate the members of the Society of the Divine Word, and all of your associates, on this the occasion of the completion of one hundred years of service to the Church, and on the climax of this event, the ordination to the episcopacy of one of your own members, and, for me a model and personal friend, Bishop Joseph Francis.

Body

Let us turn immediately to the Word of God, and open our minds to the Holy Spirit. For nothing save the Word can trumpet the deeper tones of the events we celebrate; nothing save the Word can situate these events squarely where they belong--in the ever-present eye of God, in the eschaton of the already and yet-to-happen of God's Kingdom, where all reality is both timed and timeless.

In this Holy Liturgy of Thanksgiving God's Word is alive and active. Through the Inspired Word the person of Jesus is revealed, and through him a way for our pilgrimage is discovered, truth illumines the shadows of our search, and life unfolds unto richer levels of meaning.

Hebrews 4:12

The stinging strokes of the ^{Gospel} ~~Scriptures~~ still resound in our ears. They appear harsh choices on an eventful day such as this.

Mark 8:39

Matthew
16:21
16:23
Luther's text.

Jesus remonstrates, "If a man wishes to follow me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross, and follow in my footsteps."

James 2:14

And James reflects, "What good is it to profess faith without practicing it?"

Isaiah 50:6

Isaiah prophesizes, "My face I did not shield from buffets and spitting." Do these inspired words enable us to continue in the mood of celebration which this occasion demands? More pointedly, what is the Holy Spirit saying to us with such strong language on a Day like this?

Our response to these difficult questions depend heavily upon how we answer a prior question, addressed by Jesus to his disciples and to us, personally and collectively: "And you, who do you say that I am?"

Mark 8:27

Jesus asked this question in an interesting context. He was on his way to historic Caesarea Phillipi. Caesarea Phillipi was a town of Messiahs. In its early history it had been the center of worship for the god, Baal; it was the birthplace of Pan, the god of nature, and to this day is called Pnias; finally, it is the site of the magnificent white-marbled temple built by the ruler Phillip in honor of the Roman Emperor, Caesar, also regarded as a god.

It was in this context of the aura of the gods that Jesus punctured the missionary journey of his disciples with the startling challenge, "Who do you say that I am?" That is, am I for you another Baal? A Pan? A Caesar? What kind of salvation do you seek from me? What values do you see me setting forth? How do you want me to intervene in history? Do you expect me to be the kind of Messiah commonly thought of--powerful, conquerous, violent, dictatorial? Who do you say that I am?

Only if the disciples and we ourselves could give the desired response to this fundamental question of Jesus' identity--and, therefore, to our own identity can we address ourselves to the demands narrated in today's Gospel, to the practical and ^{early} ~~func-~~ ~~tional~~ invitations of self-denial, cross-bearing, and life-losing for the sake of the Gospel.

For if we truly accept Jesus as the Awaited One, then whatever he would ask of us would be celebrative, for the ultimate reason for Thanksgiving is not the event itself, but the inner conviction and peace of having done the right thing, the good deed, of possessing the attitudes and perceptions that made the event possible in its becoming and in the accomplished fact, and, above all, in recognizing that the event is part of salvation history, is judge-able by God's standards and not by man's, and, therefore, is ultimately an act of God. This is why Francis of Assisi could speak of "perfect joy" in extreme suffering. Francis first pro-

fessed "You are Messiah," and only after, Sister Moon, Brother Sun, Brother and Sister Leper, and so on.

Our historical circumstances are no different from those of the early disciples. Clearly, we need redemption, precisely because our life in this Johannine world is by definition a life that is consistently threatened by the gods who always attempt to woo us from the God of Abraham. Indeed, it appears that by nature man's being propels him to the God who alone can satisfy his longing, but in the search for the One God, we get caught by the false mini-gods who are interwoven into the intricacies and complexities of contemporary life and the myths and false perceptions that knit the world of Satan.

My brothers and sisters, whatever strains our lips from proclaiming, "You are Messiah," is, in fact, the god we worship and follow. Whatever keeps us from shouting, "Jesus, you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life," you are my way, my truth, and my life--is the obstacle for the discovery of our real selves. The multi-formous expressions of materialism, the plotting for power and status, the search for life-styles and salaries for the comfortable and conforming life, the self-ghettoizing of our minds by our laziness to study, or by our studying only the data that supports exactly what we think now, or the self-slumming of our hearts by excluding from our company and experiences those persons and realities who think like us, look like us, or celebrate life only

John 9:11

John 9:11

3

John 14:6

Mark 8:32

the way we do--these are the Baals, the Pans, the white-marbled temples of our times. We become so entrenched in these contemporary gods, that, like Peter, when the real Incarnation of God, Jesus the Christ, stands forth, we say, "Lord, no, this is not for you, this self-giving, this suffering and dying that others might rise to new life--this is not for you." Like Peter, we too easily reject the Messiah who alone can save us, because the real Messiah does not define himself--nor us--the way we would like to make the definition.

We would like to presume that because we are here at this Liturgy, because we have been baptized, because we call ourselves Christians, that we have joined in with the acclamation, "You are the Messiah; you alone have the words of everlasting life." But, as James reminds us, unless we are practitioners of the faith, we have an empty, uninformed faith. Such faith satisfies the natural taste for some religious sense and feeling; but it does not extend beyond the level of instinct. A few years ago, a Harvard survey indicated that only 10% of those who call themselves Christians have internalized the Gospel. Truly, the inner peace that comes from the Gospel is celebratable only because one has paid the high price of both believing and practicing the faith.

My brothers and sisters, we celebrate today, because it is our conviction that for 100 years, the members of the ^{Society of the} Divine Word, to quote Isaiah, "have opened their ears to the Word of God--in

Isaiah 50-4-8

Africa; have not rebelled--in Asia; have given their backs to those who would beat them--in China, and their face they did not shield from buffets and spitting--in Australia. Wherever they have been, they have cried, "The Lord is my help," and the eternal impact of each moment of their past 100 years has made them "rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom he promised to those who love him." In their self-denial, in their cross-bearing, and in their life-losing, they have found peace and happiness, and this joy no one will take from them."

James 2:5

We celebrate the ordination of Bishop Joseph Francis as a grace bestowed upon him by the Holy Spirit. We project a future for him no different from his past--where accomplishments, challenges, and tasks fulfilled have flowed from this gifted man of God, so that God's people would receive through him the ministry of Jesus. Indeed, Bishop Francis, your ordination is a fitting climax to this centenary celebration.

At the same time, we cannot help but remark that you symbolize the aspiration and struggles of the entire Black Catholic Community, particularly, Black religious and priests. Your own celebrative self-denial, cross-bearing, and life-losing has been an example to us that patient perseverance, and an unceasing speaking and doing the truth, combined with a love for and loyalty to the Church, will produce long-lasting victories.

Similarly, the fact that two of our four Black Bishops are members of the Society, and that the majority of the Black priests in this country are members of the Society, is a clear sign that, from its beginnings, the Society of the Divine Word listened to God's Word about the dignity of man and the right of self-determination and self-expression that flow from it.

Conclusion

"And you--who do you say that I am?"

May this Eucharist, this Pass-over Mystery, this Celebration of our Saving Deeds of Salvation, simultaneously the sign and the cause of our communion with God and with each other, enable us to respond as practitioners of the Faith--You are the Messiah, You are the Way the Truth, and the Life, You are the Pioneer and perfecter of our Faith."

Fr. Joseph Nearon, S.T.O. Black priest member of the Society of the Blessed Sacrament, renowned theologian, and professor at John Carroll University, and member of the National Black Clergy Council, celebrated his Twenty-Fifth anniversary on a piece of September 3rd. Fr. Nearon spent of his priestly years here in Cleveland, and share with you accounts from the service I was privileged to deliver on that occasion. He is now in Liberia for a one-year teaching assignment at St. Gabriel's Parish.

Twenty-Fifth Priestly Anniversary
Fr. Joseph Nearon
September 3, 1980
St. Paschal Baylon

Introduction

My Brothers and Sisters, I begin with the poetry of Langston Hughes:

Hughes:

In an envelope marked
PERSONAL
God addressed me a letter.

In an envelope marked
PERSONAL
I have given my answer.

Langston Hughes

a. God's letter:

Joe Nearon,
I want your eyes and ears,
lips and voice,
head and heart
and feet
to start
telling my people,
GOD IS LOVE.

b. Joe's letter to God:

I told Jesus
be all right
to change my name:
"Here I am, Lord!
Send me!

Hush! Hush!
Somebody's callin' my name.
O, my Lord! O, my Lord!
What shall I do?
"Here I am, Lord!
Send me!

Tonight, Fr. Nearon, we celebrate the anniversary of those letters. / Tonight, you, ^{Fr. Nearon,} and we with you, celebrate the seeds of three depth experiences, three central encounters with the Lord, that grew and became pivotal points in your life. Tonight we say thanks for those experiences.

A. We proclaim thanks for the experience of God Transcendent:

Skip

I saw the Lord
seated on a high and lofty throne....
Holy, Holy, Holy
is the Lord of hosts.
All the earth is filled
with his glory.

Fr. Nearon knows well the intricacy and eccentricity of this prayer of Isaiah. As servant-thinker priest, ^{Fr. Nearon} he has criss-crossed the paths of the theological world. He has pondered, and pondered, and pondered, and tensed his life with questions and more questions, and rested in the peaceful conscience of "fidens quaerens intellectum" - faith seeking understanding.

Questions!
So many questions!
Knocking on the doors of my mind.
Questions!
So many questions!
Somewhere there are answers
I must find. (Kinette Carroll)

Faith seeking understanding.

B. Tonight we join with Fr. Nearon and say thanks for the depth experience of human solidarity and friendship. Our radical experience of our sinful selves bespeaks our selfishness and self-centeredness, our alienation from each other and quest for power over the other.

Tonight, in the spirit of Paul to the Phillipians, Fr. Nearon renders thanks to God for friends, friends who teach him the meaning of love, friends who by word and example demonstrate that true peace and happiness stem from the gift of self, friends whose living proclaims that there is neither slave nor free, Jew or Greek, male nor female, but all are one in Christ; friends who say in Christ there is not East or West (so, go to Liberia - "go, teach all nations"); friends whose lives verify the mystery and meaning of Jesus.

Thus, on this momentous Day of Thanksgiving, Fr. Nearon speaks to his friends, to you and to me, in the words of

Paul:

I give thanks to my God
everytime I think of you -
which is constantly,
in every prayer I utter,
rejoicing, as I plead
on your behalf,
at the way you have all
continually helped promote the Gospel
from the very first day.

skip

C. Tonight, we pray thanks to God with Fr. Nearon
for the depth experience of Jesus:

Jesus, in whom resides the meaning and hope of human history;
Jesus, whose Passover Mystery, reveals the inner meaning of
the struggles and aspirations of the human person; Jesus,
whose humanity brought flesh to a soul-less world and whose
divinity brought soul to a fleshless world (for until Jesus
there was no hope for flesh). Jesus, who promises truthfulness
of life in the here and now of living persons - "No one can
come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" - and
promisefulness of life in final days - "I myself am the
Living Bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this
bread, he shall live forever."

Thus, we celebrate the anniversary of his pastoral priesthood
on the day of the anniversary of his mother's death,
his mother's bursting forth to richer life, his mother's
final dieing and rising to new life, his mother's clearest
symbol-statement of the priesthood of all believers.

With Fr. Nearon we proclaim thanks to God for our own lives, for his Thanksgiving bids us to look to our very selves, our gifted selves, the unique unrepeatable reality of each of us here, our commonly shared priesthood of all believers.

We pledge ourselves to the future, for Eucharist is both a memory and a promise, a sign of the present and a foretaste of what is yet to come. Eucharist is the Sacred Table of a Heavenly Banquet in the starkness of ^{the} shocking realities of this world. Eucharist is the sign and cause of unity in a world broken with dividedness and desperation.

Eucharist draws us to the vision of Jesus, while we live the dying and rising of Jesus - in the midst of poverty and hunger, violence and war, hostages and colonialism, neglected and abandoned children, ^{family breakdown and inner wreckage,} racism and sexism,

the person's alienation from self, from the other, and from creation, and from God. Eucharist is the commonly shared bread and cup that nourishes us and proclaims - God Transcendent, Friendship and Human Solidarity,

Jesus, the artisan of the world of the already and not yet.

"I am the Living Bread come down from heaven.... The Bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

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I have given my answer.

Father Nearon, thanks for your answer.

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St. Adalbert Church
December 5, 1981
Sr. Barbara's Solemn Profession
Vocation Day, Black Religious Women

Live on in me, as I do in you.
No more than a branch can bear fruit of
itself apart from the vine,
can you bear fruit apart from me.
John 15:4

Introduction

- A. The Vocation Day - Sr. Mary Ann Henagan
Sr. Rosella, Sr. Juanita, and Sr. Barbara
- B. Today: Sr. Barbara's Solemn Profession/call to religious life - acclaim

Body

- A. Two significant events that will effect Church till the end of time:
1. the Universal Call to Holiness;
 2. the expanding role of the laity;
- the blurring of the role of religious
- B. The Occasion of Sr. Barbara's vows is a call for each of us to renew our intimate relationship with the Lord:
- "I will court her again, and bring her into the wilderness and speak to her tenderly there." (Hosea 2:14)
- C. Most especially, to bring before us all the unique call, cost of, and challenge to religious life:
- a. placing oneself at God's disposal through the vows of pverty, consecrated virginity, and obedience - for life;
 - b. for life - in a time when life commitments are too rare - a definitive bond with the Lord;
 - c. a special witness to the coming of the Kingdom of God - faith alone gives sense and meaning to religious life;
 - d. spiritual fatherhood and motherhood - for the many
 - e. through you someone else is at work: this is why people consider you important

"I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his suffering by being formed into the pattern of his death." Phillipians 3: 11

f. the charism of the founder

4th Sunday of Lent

Ascension Church
Ministry of Lectors
March 12, 1983

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news
to all creation." Mark 16:15

Introduction:

--Lady in cab: "what am I suppose to do with my
life? Tell me."

First. Who am I? Why am I here? What is my destiny?::
the classic and inescapable questions of humanity::

Questions.

So many questions.

Knocking on the door of my mind.

Questions.

So many questions.

Somewhere there's an answer I must find.

Tonight we gather to celebrate the gift of
the Word of God to the Church and through the Church
to conscience of the human family. "Go into the whole
world. . ." The proclamation of the Word is a task
given to the whole Church, but tonight we ritualize
this ministry for those whom the Church calls to exercise
it as a specific responsibility for the building up of
the Body of Christ.

My brothers, tonight the Lord says to you in a special way: ". . .he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors for Christ, God, as it were, appealing through us."

(II Corinthians 5:19)

Tonight, you enter more deeply into your diaconal call. As a servant of the Word, "you make yourselves a slave of all, so as to win over as many as possible" (I Corinthians 9:22). What you are about to do is not a boast; it is an inner compulsion and unavoidable choice. (I Corinthians 9:16).

My brother called to be lectors, by this ceremony may you develop a greater consciousness of reading, teaching, and preaching the Word of God.

In so doing, be mindful, first of all, that you proclaim God's Word, not your own; you proclaim Jesus, not yourself. Church Tradition and teaching and the authentic development of doctrine are essential ingredients in that proclamation.

Secondly, may you proclaim God's Word in its entirety. May you not select some portion of the Gospel to the neglect of others - for example, the social dimension of the Gospel over against the personal dimension of the Gospel; or, the personal dimension over the social dimension.

May you not proclaim the Word of God out of context. For example, Our Lord said in Matthew 18: "If *your* eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it from you." The wise teacher of the Word will interpret that vivid literary expression in the light of many other things our Lord said and did. He will recall how kind Jesus was to the woman caught in adultery, how he cured the lepers, how He promised that His Father would forgive us seventy times seven!

Tonight's parable of the "Compassionate Father" (note, I did not say parable of the "Prodigal Son") uniquely demonstrates the lavish love of our heavenly Father towards us who are sinners: no matter how far we have wandered, no matter how much or many of the Father's blessings we may have squandered - he never treats us as "hired hands," but always as true sons and daughters. He is vigilant for our return - while we are still a "long way off" from his love, he takes the initiative, he looks beyond our faults and sees our needs. Our Father readily says to us today what he said to Joshua of old: "Today I have removed the reproach of Egypt from you." (Joshua 5:9)

Thirdly, may you be contemporary in your proclamation of the Word. The Council document on the Ministry and Life of Priests reminds us that we are not

to preach in an abstract way. Recent popes have reminded us of the place of culture in religious instruction. St. Augustine has told us that "God speaks to people in the language people speak to themselves"! The greatest criticism that we receive from our people, particularly our youth, is that our teaching of the Word has little to do with life. Brothers, be contemporary. God has something to say about the economy, unemployment, the homeless and the hungry, drug abuse, interracial injustice, the arms race, nuclear war, and the world quest for peace, and a host of other issues. Be contemporary. God's word has something to say about self-esteem, personal goals, interpersonal relationships, human sexuality, family life, the mystery of life, the mystery of God. Be contemporary.

My brothers and sisters, the Pharisees and the scribes brought harsh judgement against Jesus: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." How true this is! The Lord not only invites us to a meal, but He himself is our nourishment for life's journey. Through the Eucharistic Table, God reconciles us to himself and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. May it be especially so this evening. May we find our reconciliation with God and with each other through His word and through His body and blood.

Morning Prayer
November 30, 1983
Emmaus Assembly
Bishop James P. Lyke, O.F.M.

"But we preach Christ Crucified...the power of God and the wisdom of God."

My brothers,

Many times we hear the phrase "will-power" and "brain power." In our culture both phrases commonly bespeak an underlying assumption: I have within my own individual person the capacity and strength to move along life's journey, pursue life's goals, and accomplish life's tasks - on my own, without needing anyone else's help or counsel. The more I am a self-made man, the more I am a man; the more self-willed I am, the more I am in possession of my destiny; the more I experience myself as being in control, the greater my sense of superiority.

Our Emmaus Journey, my brothers, has been grounded in the reversal of such cultural values: the absurdity, the folly, the weakness, the powerlessness, and the stumbling block of the Cross - "But we preach Christ Crucified, shattered, and shamed. . . the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Walking and conversing on the road to Emmaus over this past year, we have learned the unsurpassing strength of leaning upon each other's shoulders and leaning upon the Lord. We have learned well the qualities of trust, listening, sharing, dependence, abandonment, vulnerability, and availability. In each of these qualities, there is a certain dying to self, a certain risk of losing those defenses which it took us so long to build up and which kept us safe from others and comfortable in an isolated world. In short, we learned the holiness and wholeness of walking together in Christ. We have learned the power and wisdom of the Cross: "But we preach Christ Crucified. . . the power of God and the wisdom of God."

My Brothers, we know that we cannot commit ourselves to priestly service unless we are willing to embrace the folly of the Cross. We cannot joyfully sacrifice our own pleasure, ambition, and profit, unless we understand through faith that there is truly no wisdom and power through them. Our power and wisdom rests in our surrender to the Lord and our fraternal support of each other. There is no greater security except that found in the Lord and in our priestly fraternity, and in the self-giving pastoral service to that Community of Faith from which we come and of which we are a part.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Andrew. Andrew, in St. John's gospel, is the one who "brings men to Jesus." He brings his brother Simon Peter (John 1: 40); he brings the boy with the barley loaves and fish (John 6:8); and with Philip, he brings the Greeks we came seeking to speak with Jesus (John 12:22). In later apocraphal writings and in the traditions of the Greek Church, Saint Andrew was a great hero, embodying in his deeds and life the pinnacle of Christian virtue: Fortitude.

Emmaus Assembly
November 30, 1983
Page 2

To bring others to Jesus demands littleness and vulnerability: weakness. To bring others to Jesus also demands the courage, the fortitude of the apostle. The two ideas, seemingly in conflict--are of one piece: for weakness is not cowardice or timidity--weakness wed to a crass fear perhaps breeds a cowardice--but weakness joined to love and humility begets Christian fortitude: a readiness to fall in battle, as St. Thomas put it, that is, a willingness to accept the cost of our discipleship in the laying down of our lives, the surrender of our selfice interests, going out as "sheep among wolves" (Matt. 10:16) to "seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). Apostolic fortitude accepts the insecurity of our lives, our vulnerability and weakness--for without these there is no Christian life, nor spread of the Christian life, nor victory of the Cross of Christ.

"We preach Christ crucified. . . the power of God and the wisdom of God."

"But we preach Christ Crucified...the power of God and the wisdom of God."

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My Brothers, we cannot commit ourselves to priestly service unless we are willing to embrace the folly of the Cross. We cannot joyfully sacrifice our own pleasure and ambition and profit, unless we understand through faith that there is truly no ~~pleasure~~ wisdom and power through them. Our power and wisdom rests in our abandonment and surrender to the Lord and our fraternal support of each other. There is no greater security except that found in the Lord and in our priestly fraternity, and in the self-giving pastoral service to that Community of Faith

01 citizens of the nation which was first to produce atomic weapons,
02 which has been the only one to use them, and which today is one of the
03 handful of nations capable of decisively influencing the course of the
04 nuclear age, we have grave human, moral, and political responsibilities
05 to see that a "conscious choice" [in the words of Pope John Paul II]
06 is made to save humanity. [Pastoral Letter]

07 Precisely because we are Christians, precisely because we are loyal and patriotic
08 and responsible Americans, we must raise these questions.

09 The signs of our times have made us bishops students again--
10 challenging our world with disturbing questions about the very future of humanity.
11 But even if the arms race would not threaten the very survival of creation, we
12 would still be compelled to challenge world politics away from preoccupation with
13 military preparedness. As the Second Vatican Council stated:

14 The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race,
15 and the harm it inflicts upon the poor is more than can be endured.

16 [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, para. 81]

17 President Eisenhower put it much more bluntly: "Every gun that is made, every warship
18 launched, every rocket fired, signifies in the final cause, a theft from those who hunger
19 and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed."

20 In 1974 the nations of the world spent almost \$450 billion on arms and
21 weapons while aid to development amounted to less than five percent of this figure, or
22 about \$22 billion. In 1982 our national defence budget alone was about \$220 billion,
23 while programs to feed and clothe the poor were cut by \$40 billion. [cf. Justice Bulletin,
24 Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart, April 1981, p. 9]

25 But the real threat to global security is not the lack of military preparedness
26 by the so-called Western free nations, but the widening gap between the rich and the poor.
27 Dr. Paul McCleary, the executive director of "Church World Services," an international

page 2

from which we come and of which we are a part.

My Brothers, it was Saint Andrew the Apostle who introduced Peter to Christ.
~~and-then-for-the-rest-of-his-apostolic-life-~~

After this, he is mentioned only in Sacred Scripture. Thus, he goes down in history known for only one thing: so great was his service to God's people, that he literally actually crucified. In his own person, Andrew brought together in one single offering to God service and suffering -- the power and wisdom of the Cross.

01 As students--and teachers--we bishops commit ourselves in this
02 document to question and to challenge a contemporary wisdom that holds that world order
03 is best preserved by military preparedness and the quest for nuclear parity or superiority.

04 As Cardinal Bernardin observed in his introductory message to our General Assembly:

05 The basic thrust of the document is to set the voice of the bishops
06 of the United States against the technological dynamics of the nuclear
07 arms race. The letter calls for stopping the arms race, reversing its
08 direction, eliminating the most dangerous weapons systems and empha-

09
10 away from a fascination with means to destruction and toward a world
11 order in which war will be consigned to history as a method of
12 settling disputes.

13 People all over the country--even all the world--have shared the excitement
14 of us bishops, students of peace--as we explore the riches of our Catholic tradition, as
15 we examine with a critical and loving eye the history of our people, as we share and
16 affirm our people's hopes for a lasting order of justice and peace.

17 But our efforts have not been unchallenged. Students that we are, we have
18 excited humanity by our questioning and our challenge. But we have disconcerted and
19 dismayed our countrymen --and many of our own faithful as well.

20 I am no stranger to challenging the established order on behalf of human
21 rights. During the turbulent fifties, I spent many a day in civil demonstrations opposing
22 racial discrimination. I have experienced the antagonism and brutality of whites who
23 wanted to preserve the practice of segregation, and I have tasted the inhumanity which
24 my people have known since the days of slavery.

25 But in another kind of demonstration I was surprised by a far uglier
26 reaction than that which I ever met during the civil rights marches. I shall never forget
27 the time I stood along with other demonstrators for peace, in front of a bank in downtown

SOME COMMENTS ON ST. ANDREW.....

01 Andrew, in St. John's gospel, is the one who "brings men to Jesus."
02 He brings his brother Simon Peter (John 1: 40); he brings the boy with the barley loaves
03 and fish (John 6:8); and with Philip, he brings the Greeks who came seeking to speak
04 with Jesus (John 12:22). In later apocraphal writings and in the traditions of the Greek
05 Church, Saint Andrew was a great hero, embodying in his deeds and life the pinnacle
06 of Christian virtue: Fortitude.

07 To bring others to Jesus demands littleness and vulnerability: weakness. To
08 bring others to Jesus demands the courage, the fortitude of the apostle. The two ideas,
09 seemingly in conflict--are of one piece: for weakness is not cowardice or timidity--weakness
10 wed to a crass fear perhaps breeds a cowardice--but weakness joined to love and humility
11 begets Christian fortitude: a readiness to fall in battle, as St. Thomas put it, that is,
12 a willingness to accept the cost of our discipleship in the laying down of our lives, the
13 surrender of our selfish interests, going out as "sheep among wolves" (Matt. 10: 16) to
14 "seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19: 10). Apostolic fortitude accepts the
15 insecurity of our lives, our vulnerability and weakness--for without these there is
16 no Christian life, nor spread of the Christian life, nor victory of the Cross of Christ.

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The Admission to Candidacy

St. Mary Seminary

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception

December 8, 1983

11:00 a.m.

•Genesis 3: 9-15, 20

•Ephesians 1: 3-6, 11-12

•Luke 1: 26-38

The "Everyman" - the Adam - in that classic and stirring Broadway musical, "Don't Bother Me I Can't Cope" reflects on the ambiguity and inconsistency of life and ponders the meaning and direction of his own life, singing,

Questions!

So many questions

Knocking on the door of my mind.

Questions!

So many questions!

Somewhere there's an answer I must find.

Such has been the case, my brothers, ever since mankind's initial experience of fallen humanity. As with Adam, God confronts each of us in our shame and fear, in our estrangement from him and in our alienation from each other - in our sinfulness. As though this were not enough, each of us faces our personal unreconciled situations in the context of a world with serious tensions and divisions: the spirit of competition, the exploitation of others, the lack of trust, envy and hostility of many kinds, conflicts among peoples with different value systems, the impact of secularism, materialism, racism, and patriarchy - and that singularly worst of all evils - war and the possibility of nuclear devastation. In short, in the center of a self not at peace and a world not at peace, God directly but lovingly enters the garden of our lives and asks:

page 2

Admission to Candidacy

Where are you?

Who told you that you were naked?

Why did you do such a thing?

Though displeased with our performance, God does not condemn us. He condemns only the serpent, the sinful situations, the evil. Predestined as we are through Christ to be his adopted sons and daughters, chosen as we are in Christ to be holy and blameless and full of love and inheritors of every spiritual blessing, God reaches out to us with the promise of salvation, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel."

My brothers and sisters, we come together today to celebrate Mary, our Immaculate Mother. By God's grace she was preserved from sin. "Mary is God's Success Story. What God did for her, we want to become. (What God) did for her, he can and will do for us." (Ligouri Commentary, 12/8/83)

But, our Immaculate Lady was not without a question either. "How can this be," she exclaimed, "since I do not know man?" It is the single question that reflects Mary's own humanness, her own searching, pondering, and questioning. It is the single question that reflects Mary's own wonderment about how an awe-inspiring and fascinating God can make a work of art from the stuff of a messy and unreconciled world.

page 3

Admission to Candidacy

This highly-favored daughter of the Most High was "deeply troubled" by the angel's words and "wondered what this greeting meant." Gabriel's greeting gave her no answers, but only more questions, no tranquility but anxiety.

Well would Mary have quoted the poet, Rilke:

Be patient toward all that is unresolved
in your heart...

Try to love the questions themselves...

Do not now seek the answers
which cannot be given,

Because you would not be able to live
with them.

And the point is
to live everything.

Live the questions now.

Perhaps you will then,
gradually,

without noticing it,

Live along some distant day
into the answers.

page 4

Admission to Candidacy

My brothers to be admitted to candidacy for the Sacrament of Orders, you are not without your questions - about your own life and about life itself. Like all of us here, you know the cracks and pitfalls of life journey. ...

But, my Brothers, learn from Mary. She asked the most important question in all of human history and she never really received a direct answer. Upon her response rested the future and salvation of the world. God asked only one thing of Mary: to surrender herself into the Lord's hands, to trust in God, to rely upon that overshadowing Spirit.

Candidates, I say to you today, as the angel said to Mary: "Do not fear. You have found favor with God"! In the midst of your own questions, I say, "Do not fear. You have found favor with God." Be confident in God's grace. "NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD."

Come to the next step in your pilgrimage toward priesthood. With Mary's help, make her words your own, "I am the maidservant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say." "NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD."

Come to the Table of the Lord with a prayer of trust and surrender:

O Lord, the hard-won miles
Have worn my stumbling feet:
Oh, soothe me with thy smiles,
And make my life complete.

...note Fr. Gerity

page 5
Admission to Candidacy

The thorns were thick and keen
Where 'er I trembling trod:
The way was long between
My wounded feet and God.

Where healing waters flow
Do thou my footsteps lead.
My heart is aching so:
Thy gracious balm I need.