

An Address to Seminarians by Bishop Glennon P. Flavin

Given in Arnold Hall, Pembroke, Massachusetts

April 3, 1986

The following address was delivered from notes rather than from a prepared text. Transcribed from a taped recording, it is presented here exactly as it was delivered. The choice of punctuation is meant to recreate as accurately as possible the flow and the sentiment of the original address. Note that this address was pastoral, not academic, in content and in style. Footnotes are included in order to provide ease of reference to works cited by the bishop during his talk.

The talk that I was given by Fr. Sal was: "Priests for the Third Millennium: An Overview of *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Optatam Totius*."ⁱ Now the priests for the Third Millennium, I suppose, are you! I read over again the two decrees and I don't see how I'm going to cover all of this, even in an overview. Last week the letter from the Holy Father arrived-his Holy Thursday letter to priestsⁱⁱ-and I read through it. I'm sure you have, too. If you haven't, be sure that you do; it's a beautiful letter. And, I found out that it was a very neat summary of the two decrees. And I thought what I'd do is just comment on the highlights of the Holy Father's letter, and I think that that will fulfill the charge given to me. In this letter, as you know, he presented the Cure of Ars as a model for priests. He reviewed his life and ministry, and he began with a reference to St. John Vianney's difficulty in the seminary. This should be a consolation to all of you. He had a hard time, especially with Latin. He had a difficult time; in fact, he was dismissed from the seminary because of his difficulty in mastering the subjects. It was only his perseverance in following out what he was sure was his vocation, and the zeal of a good parish priest, that enabled him to get back into the seminary and to be ordained a priest.

This brings up the subject of the seminary. I'm convinced that all of the problems of the Church today are in the seminary; and, all the solutions to all the problems in the Church are in the seminary. Seminary work is the most important work of the Church because the Church will be what you become as priests.

There aren't very many good seminaries in the United States today, I don't hesitate to say. They're rare. That's why we send our students fifteen hundred miles away from home in order to receive their seminary training. There are many seminaries in between, but I wouldn't use them; I look at the good seminaries. And what is a good seminary? The Holy Father in one of his talks said it very briefly. He said there are three characteristics to a good seminary: orthodox doctrine, a sound spiritual formation, and a firm, but reasonable, discipline. If you are in that kind of a seminary, you have been blessed by God in a special way; thank Him for that blessing. But use your seminary days well. I'm sure you've been told this before: "As the seminarian,

so the priest." It's true, it's true. It really is! Make the best use of the seminary that you can-to learn as much as you can, and then to deepen your spiritual life as much as you can. And submit to the discipline; you're not going to be self-controlled men without discipline, and priests must have self-control. So if you're in that kind of a seminary, stay there, and when you become a priest and send boys to the seminary, be sure you send them to good seminaries, as the Holy Father describes them. That brings up the idea of vocations.

Concerning the shortage of priests and sisters, God knows there is a shortage; but there's not a shortage of vocations! The Lord must take care of the needs of His Church, and there is need for many priests and sisters, and only He can give the grace of a vocation. He must be giving the call to many who are not responding. I'm convinced that our young people are not saying "No" to the Lord; the young people, I think, are generous as a group. They're not saying "No"; they're not even hearing the Lord call them! It's not always their fault. First of all, look at the age we're living in, the materialism of our day. Look at the material things we enjoy ourselves: the best of food, the best of clothing, the best of transportation. We're saturated with entertainment! When we were kids we went to a movie once a month-maybe-if we had a dime! We rarely got to see a ball game; it cost fifty cents for the bleachers at the professional games. But today, you can watch movies for twenty-four hours in succession by just turning on the TV. You can see the best sporting events in the world by just turning on the TV-it doesn't cost anything-all day long! We are really saturated with the good things in life! So it's no wonder that many of our young people can't hear the spiritual call.

Fathers-to-be, Fathers of the Third Millennium, if there's a shortage of priests; it's going to be your fault. If there's a shortage of priests today, it's our fault, the priests of today; because we have to go out and we have to make these young people hear the call-and that's not easy! It takes hours and hours and hours of person-to-person contact. That's why our priests don't do it. It requires too much of their time! As priests, you need to meet with these young people one on one. Many times you have to catechize them because they don't know their Faith. Our system of catechetics has failed in so many of our schools! You have to teach them their Faith, first of all. Then you have to give them personal spiritual direction to build up and develop their spiritual lives to a point where they can hear the spiritual call and have enough love for God to say "Yes." I know this is true. The day is gone when we can wait for them to come to us. A few will, but we'll never supply the need that way. You have to go to them, and you have to be willing to spend time with them. I know from experience.

We have been very successful, thanks to God, in the Lincoln Diocese with our vocations. We have a very large number-relatively speaking--of seminarians. And the key is our diocesan Director of Vocations, who is also the chaplain at the Newman Center at the University of Nebraska. And the key is

the amount of time he spends with each individual boy or girl, one on one, starting with their freshman year. And he may not bring them to the point of saying "Yes" until their senior year. But I'm sure that he averages over a hundred hours per vocation in the time he gives to each one of them individually-and that's the secret! And if you, as priests, will be willing to spend yourselves in that kind of an apostolate, we will have enough priests and sisters to take care of the needs of our people.

The Holy Father talks about priestly zeal and-Saint John Vianney.ⁱⁱⁱ He gives the example that example that, when he was ordained, he was sent to this little parish in Ars where there were only 230 souls. And the Bishop said to him, "There's very little love there; you must put some there!" He started off with 230 souls. The year before he died, 80,000 people came to him from all over France and around the world to go to confession to him. What drew them? His own priestly zeal! He was always available, always going after the lost sheep, always ready to take care of the needs of the people who came to him. That's all zeal is! "Zeal for souls" is just another term for "love of God." If you love God enough, you'll want God to have what He wants. That's the nature of love; and, more than anything else in all the world, God wants souls. That's why Christ died on the cross. So, if you love God you must spend yourself and bring souls to Him. That's what we mean by priestly zeal. A priest without zeal is like an eight-cylinder new car-a powerful machine-without gasoline. Please God, you won't just look like a priest, but you'll be priests full of zeal for souls. Imitate our Lord, for the first words He mentioned, as quoted in Scripture, were: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Some of His last words spoken on the cross were: "I thirst." He spent His life seeking souls. That's what you must do. You don't become a priest for your own benefit! The Lord calls you and ordains you to spend yourself for others.

During your days in the seminary, grow in your love of God, and let that love of God that's in you overflow to include your neighbor. Then you won't count the cost to yourselves; you will live your lives for the salvation of souls. The Holy Father ends that section by saying to his priests: "Dear brother priests, nourished by the Second Vatican Council which has felicitously placed the priest's consecration within the framework of his pastoral mission, let us join Saint John Mary Vianney and seek the dynamism of our pastoral zeal in the Heart of Jesus, in his love for souls. If we do not draw from the same source, our ministry risks bearing little fruit!"^{iv}

The Holy Father then mentions the Cure's apostolate in the confessional: the Sacrament of Reconciliation.^v He tells how the Cure would spend sometimes ten or fifteen hours or more a day hearing confessions. This is kind of a test of a priest's zeal for souls: his love for the -confessional. It's not easy; it's difficult hearing confessions! First, it's boring when you sit there for hours at a time. It's frustrating sometimes when you seem to be getting nowhere. It's even depressing, perhaps, when you're hearing sins being confessed that are

being committed against Almighty God day after day after day. Maybe that explains-but doesn't excuse priests as they become older, and being pastors, giving the job of hearing confessions to the assistant. You've heard about Monsignors Anonymous, haven't you? Well, that's when the Monsignor, a pastor, begins to get uneasy in conscience about not helping the assistant to hear confessions on a Saturday evening. It begins to bother him but, before giving in, he has a telephone number that he rings up, and another Monsignor rushes over and talks him out of it! (*chuckle*) The test of your zeal for souls-as priests or seminarians-will be your love for the confessional. And believe me, there's many a reward!

There are many consolations in hearing confessions, even for your own spiritual benefit, like when you hear confessions of saints, and you think to yourself, "My, with all the advantages I have, I don't have *a fraction of* the holiness of this person going to confession to me now!" It's a source of edification to the priest. When he hears the confession of sinners, sometimes people say, "Oh, Father, if you only knew! I just can't go to confession!" But, if they only knew what the priest was thinking! He's probably thinking: "If I were in that person's position, would I have the courage and depth of sorrow for sin that *this* person has to go to confession and make *this* kind of a confession?" He's edified just as much by the sinner as by the saint! And think of what you're accomplishing! Here's a soul that a few moments ago was destined for hell-had lost God's life, God's grace. He comes in and kneels down before you, and you're able to say, "I absolve you from your s-ins." And then he goes on his way, and he's a Child of God again and an heir of heaven! What compares to a reward like that in anything you might do in your lifetime? Oh sure, it's hard, and it's draining. You hear confessions for three hours and you're worn out-that is, if you're really wanting to *help* people and to give them some kind of spiritual advice and to assist them in their spiritual lives. So, love the confessional! You don't have to like it. It's hard, but love it! And realize what you're doing when you go there. Now, today there's a lack of appreciation for the Sacrament of Penance; that's obvious everywhere! And, as priests of the Third Millennium, you've got to do something about that, just as we must start doing it now. And you've got to bring people to a point to appreciate the value of the Sacrament of Penance. One reason, as the Holy Father says, for the lack of appreciation for the Sacrament of Penance is the lack of a sense of sin. Sin doesn't bother some people anymore. They can live with sin! They can sleep with sin! It doesn't bother them. And that's an awful state to be in!

In your preaching and teaching, you must not be afraid to talk about sin-and hell, which is the punishment of sin. You must make people understand the evil-the infinite evil-that sin really is! Show them what it did to God! Remind them that an infinitely merciful God must condemn a soul that He loves to hell for all eternity if he dies in serious sin. That's what sin is! The confessional will be appreciated as the means by which this evil of sin can be undone. That's your job. Make confession available to our people A priest may

put in his Sunday bulletin that confessions will be heard from 3:30 to 3:45. What does that tell his people about his own appreciation for confession and the value of the Sacrament of Penance? Be in the confessional, not only on Saturday, but why not before Mass during the week? And, above all, appreciate the Sacrament of Penance yourselves. Go frequently, and be absolutely open with your confessor. This is important! The Holy Father ended that section with this beautiful paragraph: "Always be convinced of this, dear brother priests: this ministry of mercy is one of the most beautiful and most consoling. It enables you to enlighten consciences, to forgive them, and to give them fresh vigor in the name of the Lord Jesus. It enables you to be for them a spiritual physician and counselor; it remains the irreplaceable manifestation and the test of the priestly ministry."^{vi}

The Holy Father then talks about the Cure and the Holy Eucharist.^{vii} And here we're getting to the very heart of priestly ministry and sanctity. The Cure had a great love for the Mass. People came from everywhere to be at his Mass. He spent hours and hours-in spite of his busy schedule in dealing with people - before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. I hope that you young men will come to be known as priests who love the Eucharist. You shouldn't *strive* for that reputation, but you should love the Eucharist and have great devotion to the Eucharist, and that reputation will come, in spite of you. You must; this is your life! The Eucharist is Christ! The Eucharist is not a power or a thing; the Eucharist is a person! As a person, Christ can love and be loved. He's the One who calls you "friend"-a *closest* friend. You must develop an intimate union with Him, and that's what you're doing when you spend your hours in intimate communion with Him in the Blessed Sacrament. You make your visits with Him; this is when your friendship grows, and your love grows. Love the Mass as the principle of your ministry and your holiness. This is a danger because it's something that you do day after day after day, and it could become just a habit. We mustn't let it!

One thing we must always do is make a preparation for Mass-fifteen minutes. Realize what you're about to do. This is the greatest thing that any human being can do: to offer to Almighty God an act of adoration that is completely adequate to His Infinite Majesty, and, with Christ, to offer to the Father our Lord Himself in the Sacrifice of Calvary in an unbloody manner all over again! Remember what you're doing every time that you offer Mass. That's why you need that time before Mass to recollect, to become alive-that fifteen minutes. If nothing else, meditate upon that sign you often see in sacristies throughout the country. The sign says, "Priest of God, offer this Mass as if it were your first Mass, as if it were your last Mass, as if it were your only Mass." Make that your fifteen-minute meditation every day, and the Mass will not become something just ordinary. It must never become just something ordinary!

And then, dear seminarians, you've got to teach your people to love the

Blessed Sacrament. I don't know if you've noticed, but I think that our Catholic people have fallen down in their devotion and reverence and awe for the Eucharist. I think a part of that is the result of some of the liturgical changes. I'm not criticizing these liturgical practices; I'm saying that they become the occasion in which our people lose an opportunity of being taught to revere the Blessed Sacrament. I think about Communion in the hand, for instance, and lay people bringing Communion to the sick. I'm not criticizing these practices, but before, when people thought that only a priest whose hands are consecrated could touch the Eucharist, they were being taught that there's something awesome about the Eucharist—just by that action, that practice, that understanding! But whatever it is, our people are not as full of reverence for the Eucharist as they should be. And you've got to put it back there!

First of all, you teach them by your own reverence for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. In the way you handle yourself, the way you make your genuflection, the way you make your thanksgiving after Mass, the way you conduct yourself in church when a ceremony is going on, and simply because Christ is present and you 'know it and you're acting accordingly, you are teaching your people.

Then, preach to them about it. One thing that you have to preach to them about is the danger of sacrilege. Ought our people to be going to Communion every Sunday? Well, maybe they're not subjectively guilty; they don't know any better, many of them. But you have to remind them of the importance of being in the state of grace. It's very fundamental, isn't it? But, we have to do it today, and how many priests do you hear reminding the people of the need to be in the state of grace to receive our Lord in Holy Communion, and that otherwise they commit a sacrilege? I think that it's necessary that we speak this way to our people! So remind them again what the Eucharist is. Remember, the catechetical system has been poor, generally, in our schools. It has not been effective. It's even hurt, sometimes. We've got to teach them all over again what the Eucharist really is, and how we should act in regard to the Holy Eucharist.

Introduce Perpetual Adoration in your parishes wherever it's feasible. What better way could we teach our people to love our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament than to preach Perpetual Adoration day and night? You think it's impossible? It's being done in hundreds of parishes throughout our country! The people put us to shame when they take these hours day after day and night after night. In the Cathedral in Lincoln, for twenty-six years they've had Perpetual Adoration. I didn't start it; it was there when I came. Day and night, during blizzards and everything else, they come. And the priests are drawn into it whether they want it or not; but they do want it. And they take their nightly hours each week so that women can take the daytime hours. This is telling people that the Eucharist is important! They're being reminded again Who the Eucharist is! Seminarians, start now to develop it—that is, your love, your great

love and awe, and your reverence for the Holy Eucharist.

May I suggest something about vocations and the Eucharist while I'm at it? Our young people have to come to love our Lord before they will leave all things to follow Him. One of the ways to bring them to that point-and I think a very effective way-is to ask them to make a five or ten minute visit with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament every day, just to sit in His presence and talk with Him and listen to Him. As they get to know Him, He will begin to reveal Himself to them more and more. Their love for Him will grow in their souls! Then, when he calls them they will say "Yes." It's a simple practice, but it's effective. Find a young man or a young woman and ask him or her to do that, and ask them to do one more thing. Tell them: The first thing you say to our Lord is, "Lord, tell me what you want me to do with my life and I'll do it." For, every time they receive Holy Communion, they carry our Lord within them, they go back to their pew with Christ, and so close is He to them that they can even hear the Son of God within them. Surely, if they know anything about Christ, they know how much He loves them. They choose the best things for themselves, as you and I do, because they love themselves, as you and I love ourselves. But, when they pick the best things for themselves, it's what they *think* is the best; they don't know our Lord Who loves them more than they love themselves, and Who cannot err in what He chooses for them. And what He chooses will be the best for them! Tell them to trust Him and say, "Dear God, tell me what you want me to do with my life and I'll do it," and you'll know that that's the best thing for them. Remind the young people to do that. Vocations will come!

In talking to the priests, the Holy Father reminds them, in very practical words, about their devotion to the Eucharist. He says: "Dear brother priests, the example of the Cure of Ars invites us to a serious examination of conscience: what place do we give to the Mass in our daily lives? Is it, as on the day of our Ordination-it was our first act as priests¹ -the principle of our apostolic work and personal sanctification? What care do we take in preparing for it? And in celebrating it? In praying before the Blessed Sacrament? In encouraging our faithful people to do the same? In making our churches the House of God to which the divine presence attracts the people of our time who too often have the impression of a world empty of God?"^{viii} An old priest-a very old priest-made a tremendous impression upon me forty years ago. I don't know what the conversion was; I was just a young priest listening in. This old priest, who must have been past his fifty-year golden jubilee, was saying to the others, "If I could say Mass ten times a day, I'd say Mass ten times a day." That made a great impression on me. I never forgot it! Have that kind of a love for the Mass, my dear seminarians! -I say it again: this is your' life!

The Holy Father talks then about preaching and teaching.^{ix} Let me just say this: you may not take this seriously, but your first duty as a priest is to teach. The Council tells us that my first duty as a priest is to teach. The Lord

knows how we need to be teachers today! The people do not know their Faith. With all their goodwill, they don't know their Faith, generally speaking. And for heaven sakes, don't let your homilies be just sweet nothings! I hear it so often, and they're just like desserts: they taste good, but there's no meat there, and they don't nourish anybody! Really, more and more, our sermons must be catechetical. Preach the truths of the Church-our people need that-and apply them to their lives, to how they can live them. Don't just try to satisfy them, but have the intention of building them up. Edify them. Bring them closer to God in their hearts and in their lives. It's a great need today, and this is something that you can begin to do right now in the seminary-especially in the seminary-when you have time to study the techniques of preaching. Of course, be holy and you'll preach well, if you only preach loudly enough! Don't take that too much as a joke! One of the first conditions for being effective is to be heard. Preach loudly, and be sure that you're heard. But anyway, build up your talents for teaching. Learn the Faith and learn how to put it across in words that our people will understand. Make your presentation interesting to hold the attention of your people so that you can give them the Truth, and they will hear and take it and apply it to themselves in their lives. But spend some time studying homiletics. I think it's neglected in many of our seminaries today, but it's so important!

This brings up the subject of evangelization. I think that you priests are going to be right in the middle of the great thrust of the Church, which is going to be evangelization. We've got to bring the truth to the people around us. We've got to evangelize! And that means that you have to teach! I hope you'll all be convert makers. Make that your intention. It's a time-consuming task, and you can't just have classes of converts-you can do that-but part of that preparation must be one on one, because you must not only teach them of the truths; you must also develop their spiritual lives and teach them how to pray. You do that best one on one. You have to spend time. Priests say, "I don't have the time." Well, priests don't have much time, I agree; good priests are always busy! But why can't we begin to train our laity to give instructions under the priest's supervision? I think that we have to do it! We don't have enough priests. Our laity consists of many intelligent and holy lay people who could be giving courses and instruction. Let this be their work: instructing converts under the supervision of the priest. This, I say, will be the thrust of the Church in your generation: the work of evangelization. The Holy Father, speaking of preaching and teaching, tells his priests, "Dear brother priests, you are deeply convinced of the importance of proclaiming the Gospel, which the Second Vatican Council placed in the first rank of the functions of a priest. You seek, through catechesis, through preaching and in other forms which also include the media, to touch the hearts of our contemporaries, with their hopes and uncertainties, in order to awaken and foster faith. Like the Cur6 of Ars, and in accordance with the exhortation of the Council, take care to teach the Word of God itself which calls people to conversion and holiness."^x

The Identity of the Priest-to leave this out would be to leave t - his topic incomplete. The identity of the priest: Who are you? There is no doubt, as far as the Cure was concerned, about who he was and what his ministry was and what his rule was. And there must be no doubt *in* your minds, either, about what a priest is. A priest is a man who, through Ordination, shares in the very ministry of Christ Himself There's *only* one priestly ministry. It's not that there's the priestly ministry of the human priest and the priestly ministry of Christ. There's only one: the priestly ministry of Christ. You share in that priesthood of Christ, and the priesthood of Christ is the mediatorship between God and man, the spanning of the infinite gap that exists between the divine and the human, that brings God to man through the gift of divine life to man, and man to God through the redemption of sin. This is what your life is; this is 'what your priesthood is. It's identical with the priesthood of Christ-through Ordination. Our Lord promised He'd be with His Church always, even to the end of the world! And then, on Ascension Thursday, He ascended to heaven; but He didn't leave, He didn't fail in His promise. He stayed behind in His priesthood, and you, dear seminarians, are going to be those who share in that priesthood in just a short time. It's going to identify you with Christ.

In a very special way, you are going to be "other Christs," but not as an ordinary Christian is another Christ. There's going to be a different kind of identification between you and Christ through your Ordination. Now, you're going to take bread and wine in your hands and you're going to say: "This is my body; this is my blood." And then you're going to genuflect and adore on your fingertips not your own flesh and blood, but the Body and Blood of the God-Man! The identity is such. In the Sacrament of Penance, you are going to say: "I absolve you from your sins." This is for Christ who made infinite reparation for sin on Calvary. And you're going to teach and preach and guide, and the Lord will say to you, "He who hears you hears Me." Now, this is a tremendous mystery, isn't it? But the truth remains: in the priesthood, you'll identify with Christ the Priest-and you must never forget that! You know, our people who have the Faith sense that. They know that there is a difference between you and them. First of all, they call you "Father," and they're three times your age! You were the brat down the block with the dirty face and the runny nose a few years ago, and now a neighbor will kneel at your feet and say, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned." They recognize who you are-as another Christ-in a very special way. This is what the priesthood is; this is the identity. This is what you are going to be in a few short months. Never, therefore, be unaware of the awesome dignity of the priest!

The Holy Father, in making a distinction between the priest and the sharing of the priesthood of Christ in the laity, put it this way: "Attempts to make the priest more like the laity are damaging to the Church. This does not mean in any way that the priest can remain remote from the human concerns of the laity: he must be very near to them, as John Mary Vianney Was, but as a priest, always in a perspective which is that of their salvation and of the

progress of the Kingdom of God. He is the witness and dispenser of a life other than earthly life. It is essential to the Church that the identity of the priest be safeguarded, with its vertical dimension. The life and personality of the Cure of Ars are a particularly enlightening and vigorous illustration of this."^{xi}

Dear Fathers-to-be, as "another Christ" you must live a holy life; you must be genuinely holy. It's not enough that you just imitate Christ in your priestly ministry; you must be conformed to Christ in your hearts and souls. You must live a life of holiness. What is that? What is holiness? Well, it's the love of God, isn't it? It's hard to tell you what it's like; it's hard to tell you what love is, but every man knows it. It's hard to tell you what holiness is, but you know it when it's there, or when it isn't. Unless you are a holy priest, you are a useless priest! If you're not a holy priest, you won't survive in the priesthood. Or, if you happen to survive, you will just vegetate in spiritual mediocrity. I don't know which is worse! You will be effective as a priest in the degree that you are holy. I can't tell you what holiness is; but, I can tell you how you can *measure* your holiness.

You will be as holy, my dear seminarians, as you are faithful to your daily spiritual exercises, your practice of mortification and your devotion to the confessional. Check yourselves on that! Are you making your preparation for Mass every day? Are you offering a thoughtful, reverent and devout Mass, and making your thanksgiving after Mass because you appreciate what Mass is? Are you growing in your intimate friendship with Christ in your visits to Him in the Blessed Sacrament? Are you learning how to live a holy life by reading the saints, other spiritual reading, and Scripture? Are you staying close to the Lord and honoring Him in the name of His people through the recitation of your Office day after day, saying them devoutly, slowly, reverently? Are you practicing mortification, as you must, for your own sins and for the sins of the world? Are you going to Confession yourselves frequently-and opening yourselves to your confessor so that you never deceive yourself?

Be faithful to your daily spiritual exercises, dear seminarians, and you will be effective priests. You must start that right now. I'm sure you all have. There are many other things we could say, but let's end it here. And let's end it as the Holy Father ended his letter to priests with reference to the Cures devotion to the Mother of God. How better could we end? The Holy Father says: "We entrust our Priesthood to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of priests, to whom John Mary Vianney ceaselessly had recourse with tender affection and total confidence. This was for him another reason for giving thanks: 'Jesus Christ,' he said, 'having given us all that He could give us, also wishes to make us heirs of what is most precious to him, his Holy Mother.'"^{xii}

It's nice to be with you. I'm edified by your presence, to think that you have given your holidays to come and spend this time with our Lord and with each other. You're going to be good priests, and as good priests your going to

live the happiest life in all the world. There's no doubt about it, none whatsoever! After almost forty-five years as a priest, if by some strange gift from God I were brought back to your age, but I retained the memory and experiences of forty-five years as a priest, and now I were trying to make up my mind: "Should I go on and be ordained a priest?"-my dear seminarians, I wouldn't hesitate for a fraction of a fraction of a second to snatch the gift that God offered me. Oh, it's a great gift!

You know, our Lord must have a special love for those who would follow Him when He calls them-who leave all else and follow Him. Didn't He promise Saint Peter that He'd give him a hundredfold reward and everlasting life? He said a hundredfold reward *and* everlasting life. They're different, then! Everlasting life is given when this life ends. The hundredfold reward, therefore, must be right here on earth! What is it? What fame or fortune or pleasure? Well, that's what you give up! Thus, it can only be that inner peace of mind and heart that is God's gift of love in gratitude to you who left all things to follow Him. Saint Therese was right. She said: "I live the happiest life that can be." Dear seminarians, any priest or sister who really lives his or her commitment without a doubt lives the happiest life that can be!

1 Second Vatican Council. "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*): 1965; "Decree on the Training of Priests" (*Oplatum Totius*): 1965.

2 John Paul II, "Letter of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, to all the priests of the Church on the occasion of Holy Thursday 1986." *Letters to My Brother Priests* (Chicago: Midwest Theological Forum, 1992) 139-152.

3 Ibid., no. 4.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., no. 7.

6 Ibid. This passage restates some ideas from the Holy Father's *Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 1983* (no. 3).

7 Ibid., no. 8.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., no. 9.

10 Ibid. In this passage, the Holy Father included some ideas from the Second Vatican Council's "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4).

11 Ibid. Again, the Holy Father makes a reference to *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 4.

12 Ibid., 11

This talk was taped, transcribed and edited by Fr. Matthew E Eickhoff, Diocese of Lincoln. Because editorial changes were minimal and only incidental in nature,

they were not indicated in this manuscript so that an easily readable text could be presented Bishop Flavin was installed as Bishop of Lincoln on August 17, 1967 and retired on March 24, 1992. He returned to the Lord on August 27, 1995.

The following selection is Bishop Flavin's introduction, which immediately preceded his more formal presentation.

My dear seminarians, I'm happy to see that there are at least a few Cornhuskers among you. I'm surprised that they would give up their Easter vacation to come up; they must have known that I was going to be here! I hope that they're not scandalizing the rest of you! I know most of you are from the East and don't know much about Nebraska, but I just left Lincoln and I'd like to tell our seminarians from Nebraska that the Indians are on a warpath! It's not safe to travel Interstate 80 without a cavalry! And the cowboys, driving their herds from Texas to Ogallala, just shot up the town of Wahoo! (*chuckle*)

These aren't bad fellows, these seminarians (from Lincoln), once you get to know them. There's hope for them! Some time ago I was asked to give the morning prayers for a group of five hundred Methodist ministers having a convention in Lincoln during the summer, and so I got a few of the seminarians together and drew up a little ceremony. We had a guitarist and a reading from Scripture; they sang a song-they sang pretty well-and I gave a talk on the Scriptures, and I made reference to the seminarians. It was a little hard for these five hundred Methodist ministers to know who they were, and I apologized for the way they looked! Then I told them that they're seminarians, so they won't always be that way. The seminary-it works miracles -It makes silk purses out of sow's ears! I ordained one of those seminarians last year, so after ordination he said, "Bishop, are we still sow's ears, or are we silk purses now?"

(reformatted 8/4/98 & again 8/30/09 for the Year for the Priests)

