



Archdiocese of San Antonio
Most Reverend Gustavo Garcia-Siller



Homily – Assumption Seminary Centennial Mass
October 2, 2015

“I will rejoice heartily in the LORD, my being exults in my God.”
These words of Isaiah are echoed by Mary: **“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.”** These words also flow from our hearts this evening as we celebrate God’s blessings of one hundred years at St. John / Assumption Seminary!

An anniversary is a time of deep gratitude for the past, joyful celebration of the present, and steadfast courage for the future.
Deep Gratitude: The Church in the United States and Canada is very grateful for the more than eight hundred priests who received their formation at St. John / Assumption seminary. They have served in fifty-eight dioceses and five religious communities. Among these alumni are twelve bishops, some of whom are with us today.

The seminarians have been taught and formed by dedicated diocesan clergy, men and women religious, permanent deacons, and lay people on the seminary staff and in our parishes. I acknowledge

especially the Vincentians, Sulpicians, Oblates of Mary Immaculate, and the Hermanas Josefinas. Moreover, we are blessed with wonderful collaborators: the Mexican American Catholic College, the Oblate School of Theology, and the University of the Incarnate Word.

Hundreds of thousands of lives have been shaped and influenced by the dedicated alumni of this seminary during the past century. We give thanks to God this evening for everyone who has contributed to this endeavor in any way!

Joyful Celebration. The words of St. Paul to the Ephesians echo in our hearts today: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” Today the family of faith here at Assumption Seminary includes seventy-eight seminarians from fourteen dioceses in Texas, California, Nebraska, Tennessee, and El Salvador. I am pleased to report that thirty-two of them are from the Archdiocese of San Antonio.

In January, Vatican Archbishop Jorge Patron-Wong spoke to us about the task of seminary formation: first, to form the human person; then, the Christian; and, finally, the priest. Our formation program has four pillars: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. At the beginning of our centennial celebration, Bishop Michael Burbidge spoke to us about these dimensions. The human and

spiritual dimensions of the program are at the heart of what happens on this campus. The intellectual formation primarily occurs at our sister institutions that I just mentioned, and the pastoral dimension also occurs at ministerial sites. In his homily opening the centennial year, Bishop Barnes said that the seminary named for Mary has been our mother, raising us to be disciples. Last September, Archbishop John Wester reminded us that parishes help to form seminarians as well as to form priests for the rest of their lives. All four pillars of formation are coordinated and integrated here by the formation staff who minister daily to our seminarians. This is a great consolation and joy to any bishop, as the bishops with us today can attest!

This all may sound simple and easy, but the formation process is complex and challenging. Seminarians are discerning their vocation from God, and this requires patience, wise counsel, and spiritual direction. This is also a bilingual and multicultural family. Some of our students are from Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Nigeria, Kenya, India, Philippines, Vietnam. All leave behind their families and friends to engage in an intense preparation for their future lives as diocesan priests.

The program is demanding because the needs of the people whom the Church serves are great and varied. Many of our alumni work (or will work) in cross-cultural, sometimes multicultural,

settings. This requires sensitivity to cultures, a clear sense of personal identity, an openness to others, a respect for diversity, the ability to dialogue with others -- often in another language!

We are proud of our formation program even though we know we have to make it better in accord with the emerging needs of those we serve. So, our present situation calls for joyful celebration!

Steadfast Courage. The present and the future are shaped in part by Pope Francis' vision of the Church, its mission, and its ministries. In April, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez-Madariaga, a close advisor of the Holy Father, spoke to us about the implications of this vision for seminary formation. Pope Francis has consistently talked about developing a culture of encounter, dialogue, inclusion – about the love, mercy, and compassion of God for all people – our commitment to the poor and the need to care of our “common home,” the earth. I cannot describe this vision in detail, but our minds and hearts still ring with his messages during his apostolic visit here last week -- for example, “as shepherds...we are to seek out, to accompany, to lift up, to bind up the wounds of our time.”

Priestly ministry consists in celebrating the sacraments, preaching and teaching, and serving others.

To celebrate the sacraments, the priest must have a profound understanding of the mysteries we celebrate. This comes from study and, especially, from encounter with the triune God in daily prayer. The sacraments are to be celebrated prayerfully, in an inviting way, encouraging the people to participate fully and attentively. God is at work through the sacraments!

Preaching and teaching the word of God requires a profound understanding of the truth of the gospel as well as its challenge. The spotlight should not be on the priest himself but on the word of God. Moreover, a homilist must know the situation of the congregation. In preparation, the homilist dialogues with the word of God. In the homily he sets up a dialogue with the congregation so that they too may enter into dialogue with the word of God in their own lives.

Serving others. Pastors have their model in the Good Shepherd, a servant leader. In November, Dr. Carolyn Woo spoke to us about the gospel mandate to serve the poor and the needy, the forgotten and the neglected. In January, Sister Barbara Reid reflected with us on the washing of the feet narrative in John's Gospel as a paradigm for Pope Francis' ministry. The Holy Father has consistently told us to open up the doors of the Church to let Christ out into the world! Go out! Go out! Go out as Jesus did, as Pope Francis does. This is a great challenge for all of us. We must do it with generosity and joy.

In speaking to us bishops last week Pope Francis said: “May the word of God grant meaning and fullness to every aspect of [people’s] lives, may the sacraments nourish them with that food that they cannot procure for themselves, may the closeness of the shepherd make them long once again for the Father’s embrace.”

The Holy Father also said: “Ours must not be just any kind of prayer, but familiar union with Christ, in which we daily encounter his gaze and sense that he is asking us the question: ‘Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?’ One in which we can calmly reply: ‘Lord, here is your mother, here are your brothers! I hand them over to you; they are the ones whom you entrusted to me.’ Such trusting union with Christ is what nourishes the life of a pastor.” To sum up: Prayer is the key to all we do as bishops and priests.

So, let us pray, pray, pray. May the Holy Spirit guide and empower us to proclaim the Lord Jesus and his gospel with our every word and deed, binding up the wounds of those we encounter.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady Assumed into Heaven, continue to be with us and embrace us with her maternal love.

Remarks after Communion

We began our celebration fourteen months ago, and have marked this milestone with seventeen events! I am very grateful to all of you for what you have done to make these such joyful occasions – I especially thank Father Jeff Pehl, the rector, the staff of Assumption Seminary, the centennial committee, the alumni –everyone who has helped to create, plan, and implement the events of this special centennial year!