

**Homily – Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time
Opening Semester, Assumption Seminary – August 25, 2024**

Bishop Gary, Fr. Jim Myers, faculty and staff members of Assumption Seminary, dear seminarians; as we embark on a new academic semester, we gather to reflect on our vocation, and how we are called to be shaped by the cross and the Eucharist. My foundress, Blessed Conchita, said: *“The cross and the Eucharist are the school of the saints. On the cross we are taught; at the Eucharist we learn. On the cross we suffer; at the Eucharist we love. On the cross we die to live in the Eucharist.”* These words capture the essence of our journey together in this seminary.

In today’s readings, we see a profound invitation to make a decisive choice in our faith. Joshua challenges the Israelites to choose whom they will serve, whether the gods of the land or the Lord who delivered them from Egypt. Their response, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord,” echoes the choice we must make as we begin this semester. We are free to choose, yet this freedom is not without responsibility. Just as Israel faced the temptations of foreign gods, you too face distractions and challenges in your formation. The choice to follow Christ in our vocation requires a commitment to continually renew our covenant with God, just as the Israelites did at Shechem.

Seminarians, you are not being formed to be officers or employees of the Church. Your formation is a path of discipleship. As Pope Francis reminds us, *“Without a constant relationship with God, the mission becomes a job.”* The Gospel reminds us of the radical demands of discipleship. Jesus’ teaching on the Eucharist

led many of his disciples to turn away, unable to accept the depth of His call. Yet, it is precisely in the Eucharist where we find the strength to embrace the cross. Jesus asks His disciples, “Do you also want to leave?” The response you are called to give every day in your formation is the same as Peter’s response, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Your life in the seminary is a desert journey, where contrasts in faith shape you – doubt and belief, struggle, and peace. Just as manna sustained Israel in the desert, the Eucharist sustains us in our journey of faith. But this sustenance is not for us alone. Jesus laid down His life for the salvation of the world, and we are called to do the same through our vocation. This semester, let us commit to laying down our lives for God and His people, embracing the cross and the Eucharist as the school where we learn to love, suffer, and ultimately live in Christ.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe guide you, for this semester to be a time of deepening our commitment to Christ, where your studies, prayers, and community life lead us closer to the heart of the Eucharist, the source of our strength and the summit of our faith.