



Sacred Heart WELCOME

VISION ■ Very Rev. Raúl Gómez- Ruiz SDS, *President-Rector*



RECTOR'S DAY TALK,
21 AUGUST 2023

Welcome to our annual Rector's Day! This year has special significance for me personally and for Sacred Heart in certain aspects. I began working here in the

summer of 1988 as the first Director of what was then the Hispanic Studies Program. I thought I was going to be here for 10 years and then move on. I ended up being here for 24 years before moving on! During that period, I completed a PhD in liturgical theology, I served as Vice Rector, and the Vice President of Academic Affairs as well as taught Spanish, Hispanic Ministry, sacramental theology, and liturgy courses. I returned after a hiatus of 7 years and am now starting my fifth year as President-Rector. That makes 35 years that I've been associated with Sacred Heart.

This year, however, is even more significant for Sacred Heart. In 1973, the CARV program was established here by the Priests of the Sacred Heart, to prepare older vocations for the priesthood. **That was the beginning of a trajectory that now brings us to 50 years of**

specialized formation, not only for priesthood but also for lay ministry preparation and other educational programs. In 1973 those in their mid-20s were considered older vocations; today that concept has expanded to take into account life and work experience, education, age, and other factors which means we have students from their mid-20s to early 70s in the various programs we offer.

When I began, there were 124 seminarians living in this building. **Though the number of seminarians is fewer, we still have around the same number of students in our various programs.** I'm particularly pleased that this year we are up a couple of seminarians from last year, slowly moving us closer to our target number of residential seminarians, which we may reach in January. This is due to the excellent work of Monica Misey, Lynn Kaestner, and Deacon Steve Kramer as well as Ruth Markworth, Emili Nollge and all of you who promote Sacred Heart.

When I began, we had a relatively stable full-time and adjunct faculty. There was very little turnover. When I left in 2012, we had begun to increase the number of faculty because of new program offerings. During my 7-year hiatus, there

was a large number of retirements, and when I returned, we faced the need to hire replacements as well as new faculty to meet the demands of the Program of Priestly Formation and accreditation.

So this past year in particular, we have hired an unprecedented number of faculty and staff.

We've hired eight full-time faculty in Academics, the Library, Formation, and ECS. We've hired five new staff persons to fill positions so that we have the capacity to accomplish our mission as well as the requirements that come to us from the implementation of the PPF6 and accreditation. At the same time, we have outsourced our IT and bookstore functions, revised our Memo of Understanding with St. Francis de Sales Seminary, established a new MoU with the SCJ formation program, and updated our BOD by-laws, and advanced our strategic plan, all helping us to use our resources more efficiently and effectively. Thank you to Dr. Monson, members of the Academic Advisory Board, the Vice Presidents, Dr. Barbara Anne Cusack and the members of the Board of Directors, Tyler Galstad, Ann Owen, and so many of you in helping us achieve this. And thank you to the administrators and staff members who have taken on new roles or had their duties adjusted, such as Fr. Ziggy Morawiec, Dr. Julie O'Connor, Lynn Kaestner, Pearce Pomerleau, Kathy Darlington, Amy Clavette, Rachel Allison, and Laura Sokolosky. Thank you to the maintenance team, Mike Erato, Clayton Zieroth, Steve Andrzejewski, Jason Kane and David Bakala for your part in helping us achieve our mission. I'm very humbled by how the staff, the administrators, and faculty are such good stewards of our resources.

These things provide us with a dynamism and energy to accomplish our mission to **prepare evangelizing disciples through specialized formation to conform our world to the heart of Christ. Each one of you is needed for this mission. And this mission requires that we dream big.**

Five years ago, at Rector's Day, I laid out my vision for those present. I said then that upon returning, I had seen just how far Sacred Heart had advanced and was truly on the verge of greatness. Sacred Heart has continued to advance toward greatness. Just as then, I believe this is due not only to the dedication, hard work, and unwavering investment of the administrators, staff, faculty, and board of directors who have met many challenges, like the Covid pandemic and its aftermath, but especially to the dynamism brought to Sacred Heart by Fr. Tom Knoebel, my predecessor.

Fr. Tom inspired the Seminary community with his vision linked to Jeremiah 29:11-12, namely: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for your harm to give you a future with hope..." "A future with hope." I sense this hope is still coursing through the life of the seminary. In 2019 as now, there were many new employees. They were wondering who I was and what my leadership would be like.



I said then, that while Fr. Tom was a visionary, I am a dreamer. At a gathering of youth in North Macedonia in 2019, Pope Francis decried the lack of dreaming among the youth of today. So, he admonished them to dream, and to dream big! **I still take my inspiration from his words as well as from the prophet Joel 3:1: "it shall come to pass I will pour out my**

spirit upon all flesh, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”

I am now on the verge of 70, an old man to some, but certainly with big dreams. When I began teaching at Sacred Heart, I was in my mid-30s. Even then I envisioned a bright and glorious future for Sacred Heart. Today, I dream of Sacred Heart as a place of excellent priestly, religious, and ministry formation. One of the dreams I had in 2019 was that Sacred Heart would be a full house of diocesan and religious seminarians and with programs full of students, where bishops and religious superiors want to send their seminarians. And where men and women, lay and religious want to study. It's a dream that over the last four years has mostly come true. That's because we have gained the prestige of enjoying national and international fame for our superb theological, spiritual, pastoral, and human formation. We receive feedback from visitors and sponsors alike that they find us a welcoming and accommodating institution that strives to meet the needs of the Church. And, we are a holy place, where the world meets to encounter and extend the reign of God.

Yes, I'm a dreamer, but I also have my feet on the ground. Dreams can only be achieved if we take care of those things that will help us move forward to attain them. Clearly, one of those things is the continued support and dedication of the SCJs to the future of the seminary. A sign of this is the investment they have made in renovating the building. I thank them for their generosity and vision, for...

...Sacred Heart is their seminary. It is an important apostolate of the US Province as well as of their world-wide community as one of only three major Dehonian seminaries in the world. Seminary formation has been part and parcel of the SCJs in the US for 91 of the 100 years they have been here. Along with their other apostolates, Sacred Heart adds to the prestige of their presence and charism in the US, making



it visible here and around the world. **Because of this it's imperative that the SCJ charism and Dehonian spirituality be an integral part of the life and purpose of Sacred Heart.**

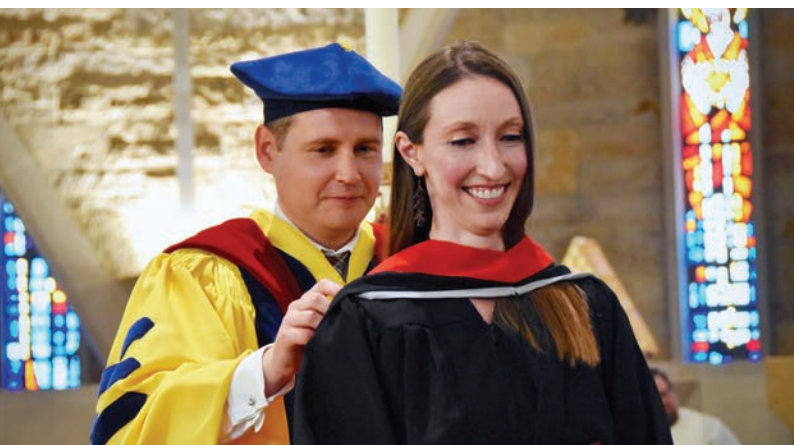
In fact, it's my ardent hope that I will be succeeded by an SCJ. And this requires a large investment including the right attitude, commitment, preparation, and knowledge of what's required of a major seminary to function and succeed in the US. Also, I still believe it's important that Sacred Heart have a connection to the other two SCJ major seminaries so that the Dehonian spirit grows at Sacred Heart.

At the same time, it's very important that SCJs recognize that we, the administration, staff, faculty and board of directors of Sacred Heart are their partners: the spirit of Fr. Dehon and his charism are at work here. Like all charisms, it was a gift to Fr. Dehon, and so through him to the world, as an instrument of God's life and salvation at the service of Church and society. Consequently, I believe because of that Sacred Heart, with its administration, staff, faculty, and board of directors add to the richness of the expression of his charism in the US and beyond.

You and I offer the SCJs our dedication and collaboration in this regard. I have seen and heard over the last four years just how much you are truly invested in Sacred Heart. You see yourselves as partners in this enterprise. Furthermore, as a result of my six years in Rome, it has been very clear to me that the future of religious congregations, and their major institutions, involves greater collaboration and sharing of resources in order to move into the future and bring our unique perspective to bear

on the life of the Church. I see my appointment as a sign of this. Therefore, Sacred Heart is not only an SCJ seminary, but it is also my and your seminary. Yes, Sacred Heart is your seminary.

So, given this, what do I envision for Sacred Heart? I see a place where God's reign, God's kingdom, is flourishing. This is linked to the Dehonian value expressed in the motto *Adveniat Regnum Tuum*, "may your kingdom come." It's already taken root at Sacred Heart; it's our duty to contribute to its growth and development. Thank you, Fr. John Mack and the formation faculty, for your contribution. Actually, this is done by all involved, not by one person alone.



Therefore, I envision that everyone associated with Sacred Heart is responsible for its success in accomplishing what Christ is asking of the seminary and what the Holy Spirit is guiding it to be. I certainly do not have all the answers, nor is my vision perfectly clear. Therefore, if I have made any difference at all it's because I have been able to cooperate with God's work in me and in you: I am incomplete without you... and you are incomplete without me. And together we are incomplete without God.

So, I have a strong sense of what God wants for Sacred Heart regarding our life in the heart of Christ as seen in the four dimensions of formation, in terms of the life of the seminary and in terms of relations with the SCJs and

other sponsors, both diocesan and religious. I have a strong sense also of what God wants of Sacred Heart in terms of service to the Church and to the world, and in terms of why I've been chosen to be rector at this time.

Basically, I envision Sacred Heart offering a new model of seminary and theological study that will help the Church move toward a future with fewer priests and more collaborative ministry among diocesans, religious, and laity. Our mission statement says this clearly: we are "preparing evangelizing disciples through specialized formation to conform our world to the heart of Christ." For that reason, Sacred Heart is more than an SCJ seminary: it belongs to something larger, it belongs to God's purpose.

With this in mind, the starting point is Spiritual Formation: our relationship with Christ has to be the center of everything to which we aspire, everything we do, and for everything which we hope. There has to be a dialogue, a connection, between what we study in the classroom or what we do in our offices, and what we pray in the chapel. I see this captured in the SCJ expression *In Corde Jesu*, "in the heart of Christ." Thank you to Dr. Benjamin Stone who helps us pray so well liturgically as part of this.

One of the ways we can grow in our relationship with Christ is to give evidence that we are a prayerful community. Therefore, every class day I have asked the entire community present on campus, administrators, staff, faculty and staff, to assemble in the main chapel between 11:45 and 11:50 in preparation for the praying of the Angelus, when the bell strikes at 12:00, and then go to the dining room for lunch. Thank you for your cooperation since it means adjusting your work and schedules a bit. I'm truly convinced that our praying together leads to great results.

So, then how do I envision the results of the formation/education of those who come to study or to work or to participate in the programs offered by Sacred Heart? I see those who study,



work, and graduate at Sacred Heart as persons imbued with grace who are becoming more and more Christ-like, so that when they leave Sacred Heart they have come to know Jesus Christ in a deeper way (i.e., intimately), to love Him more intensely so as to follow Him more closely, and, therefore, capable of making Him known, loved and served better in the context to which they are called to serve. I see them as instruments of Christ's love and salvation, preparing the way for Him in all that we are and do. This requires attention to spirituality in its many forms.

In terms of Intellectual Formation, Sacred Heart has always been very strong in this area despite criticism that it was watered down for the older vocation. But especially after working for ATS, I see just how demanding our program has been and is, in comparison to so many other Roman Catholic seminaries in particular. I'm grateful to Dr. Robert Gotcher and all those involved in our effort to fulfill our accreditation demands. We have been quite successful in this effort. A sign of this is that many of our graduates and participants in our programs, have gone on to take on important service within their dioceses or religious congregations, for example as bishops, chancellors, moderators of the curia, vicars general, major superiors, and formators. We continue to need to make this better known.

Consequently, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as

persons who are well-educated to understand the Church's teaching in all of its forms. I envision them as persons capable of applying the Church's teaching using their intelligence born of a deep relationship with Christ. That is, as persons capable of using appropriate critical thinking and deep reflection on what they have learned, including openness to what Christ is revealing to us through, not only the Church, but also the world and the experiences of the people around us.

Therefore, I envision our graduates as persons committed to developing their knowledge and understanding with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I see them as persons who've acquired or built on the needed skills in order to be more effective in their service. I see them as persons who are able to dialogue because they know their knowledge is incomplete. I see them as persons who desire to be all that Christ has called them to be. I see them as persons, whose desire to continue learning after they leave Sacred Heart, has been given impetus by what they have learned and experienced here.

In terms of Pastoral Formation, experiences have to be well chosen but also the purpose of these experiences has to be clear to those who engage in them. The selection of appropriate guides has to continue to be a priority but also the continuing formation of these guides needs to be offered to the extent possible.

I'm grateful that this is being attended to by Michael Beard and the formation team as we strive to adapt our program to the PPF6.

I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people of service, who put the needs of others ahead of their own, who are available to serve and go where the Lord is leading them. I would like them to be people who know that it's all about Jesus and not about themselves or their personal commitments, interests or ideologies. And therefore, I envision them as persons who care about others and who permit their hearts to be touched by others. That's why we offer the Hispanic Ministry Preparation Program, the Lux Center for Catholic Jewish Studies, and the English and Cultural Studies Program as well as the various MA Pathways. Thank you, Fr. José González, Rabbi Michal Woll, John Sweeny, Ryan Stubbs among others who help us move outside of ourselves to be touched by others.

And, in terms of Human Formation: this is the most challenging of the four dimensions, not only at Sacred Heart but in all houses of formation. I envision a program that attends not only to celibacy formation but also to such basic things like manners, and to more demanding things like communication skills, conflict resolution, ability to listen and dialogue, community living, valuing the common good and balancing it against individual needs, identification of and respect for appropriate boundaries, fostering humility and goodness, appreciation for and celebration of differences, how to build bridges and tear down walls, fostering healthy relationships and self-esteem, etc. Sacred Heart already has a good foundation for this in terms of our reputation for hospitality, which is often taken for granted. Hospitality is the ability to put others first rather than oneself.

Therefore, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs as people who are in touch with their humanity, in a healthy way, who are capable of



understanding and responding to the human condition with compassion and with the heart of Christ. I see them as persons who are able to love others because they themselves have been loved. I see them as persons who are able to treat others as they wish to be treated. I see them as persons who are able to create unity in diversity as expressed in the SCJ motto *Cor Unum*, "of one heart."

In sum, I envision our graduates and those who participate in our programs, as persons who have received the appropriate type of formation whether they are diocesan, religious or lay so that they can live, move and have their being in Christ (see Acts 17:28). Thank you to all of our faculty members, full-time and adjunct in the various categories for your part in this.

So, what do I envision for our administration?

Our administrators are very hard working and talented. You've helped Sacred Heart improve its programming and offerings with clear goals, procedures, and desired outcomes for the most part. The Strategic Plan is a good example of this. I'm grateful that Dr. Patrick Russell will be helping us move this forward. Yet I also see that communication continues to falter at times and so I challenge us all to work on improving that. We have been working more as a team, modeling good, shared decision-making and putting into practice, as well as possible, the principle of subsidiarity so that decisions are made at the right level in the organization. Even so, when I began in this role, I thought I was not a micromanager, but wanted to be

well-informed of what's taking place and of the decisions being made. That's because often what are perceived to be small decisions have the biggest impact. Unfortunately, I have been more of a micromanager than I thought so I pledge to continue to entrust the administrators with the necessary authority and to trust the Spirit working with and through them.

In addition, in order to facilitate the management needs of the seminary, I envision that the two main internal administrative structures, the Rector's Cabinet and the President's Council, will remain in place.

Over the last four years I've expanded the Rector's Cabinet membership to include a variety of directors and staff in order to make sure a range of voices are heard. Periodically I adjust the membership for this purpose. We meet once a week for an hour and a half to help us be more efficient, timely and on point. I also publish a quick summary of the meetings and once approved send the minutes of the Rector's Cabinet so that all are informed of what we're doing.

And while the Rector's Cabinet deals with the concerns of the various departments and programs that comprise the seminary, the President's Council has the duty of looking more at the bigger picture. The Vice Presidents are those who help me see the broader issues and by whom and when they should be addressed. They help focus on moving the seminary toward greatness, with hope, and remembering that it's all about Jesus and His kingdom among us. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the faculty council: under the leadership of Dr. Steven Shippee, it shares in the governance of the seminary as well as in helping us advance as an institution through its deliberation on important points as needed while at the same time providing me with advice, feedback and input.

So, what do I envision for our staff?

I see you as partners in all that is Sacred Heart. St. Benedict says that when consulting the community, such as in chapter, we are to consult the youngest members as well, since often they have insights lost on those with more experience. Often staff are treated as if they were like the young and had little to contribute, other than fulfilling well their duties. But you have a wisdom and knowledge that needs to be consulted periodically. I see you as persons who want Sacred Heart to continue to be a vibrant, pleasant, and exciting school with which you are associated, because you are Sacred Heart also. So, in order to foster your contribution, I have organized a general staff meeting every quarter to provide an opportunity for dialogue and better communication among us. Also, as many of you are aware, I have consulted with staff and their supervisors regarding how best to distribute workload equitably. Consequently, some job duties have been reorganized and job titles changed to help respond to our administrative needs as well as for the interests of the persons involved. Thank you for your patience as we continue to tweak this as we go forward.

Then, what do I envision for our faculty?

Under the leadership of Fr. Mack, Dr. Russell, Dr. O'Connor, and Dr. Monson, the faculty has met many challenges over the course of the last four years resulting in needed adjustments to our programs. In general, we have always had a very dedicated and gifted faculty. Even so, I



envision you continuing to grow as persons of faith who have entered into a deep dialogue between faith and reason. I see you not only as teaching theology well in its various forms and related disciplines, but also as those who do theology, contributing to its development. That is, I see you as persons who are reflecting on what you are teaching, open to what is taking place around you in Church and society, and who share your insights not only in the classroom and formation sessions, but beyond through talks, articles, and books.

In terms of programs, what do I envision?

I noted in 2019 a great bubbling up of ideas and initiatives developed at Sacred Heart during the time I had been away. This ferment is wonderful, and I'm grateful it has continued. At the same time, we need to always assess what Sacred Heart is truly capable of doing at a given time due to real limits and the need to be well focused on what Christ is asking of us at this time in order to move toward the future.

For Sacred Heart to be able to respond to the changing needs of the Church and the people around us, I envision Sacred Heart continuing to develop the excellent MDiv and academic programs offered here

while upholding appropriate academic and formation standards. But also, Sacred Heart needs to continue incorporating various ways of learning and teaching (conferences, workshops, lectures, seminars, cohorts, affinity groups, mentoring, study tours, etc.). It should also be creative in this regard. Furthermore, we need to continue seeing priestly formation, whether diocesan or religious, as situated at the heart of the purpose of Sacred Heart.

Because of this, Sacred Heart needs to devise a formation program appropriate for diocesan and religious candidates for priestly ministry. The PPF6 is giving us some guidance in this regard. Even so, too often both diocesan and religious formation programs do more to infantilize those who go through them than to help them become fully what they're being called to be as priests and/or religious. Our experience with older vocations should give us insights into how to overcome this, as well as to minimize the tendency towards clericalism. This may mean developing parallel programs, or one in which certain pieces are shared while what is specifically needed for one group or the other, is done in an appropriate manner. Our development of affinity groups for formation is a step in this direction.





In terms of academics, I envision the continued development of the Cor Unum MA program, with its well-rounded cohort model of learning beyond the purely academic. I especially applaud its goal of graduates prepared to heal a fractured world. And Sacred Heart should continue to offer and develop the Lumen Cordis MA in theology for those who want or need something slightly different. Also, the new distance-learning Adveniat Regnum Tuum MA program with SCJ seminarians from India provides Sacred Heart another avenue for serving the world-wide Church and establishes it in a unique position among seminaries. Finally, the new MA in Catholic Studies is a great response to the changing landscape of our accreditation and student visa needs as well as to the changes envisioned to seminary formation in the PPF6. Thank you to Dr. Kate Milco among others for your contribution to this effort.

Furthermore, I envision the offering of Ecclesiastical Degrees, not only for seminarians who wish to pursue them, but also for clergy, religious, and lay people both within the US and outside of the country. This will also contribute to a higher profile for Sacred Heart and help it be more at the service of the world-wide Church. We have made some strides in terms of this through our pending affiliation with the Gregorian University. Thank you to Dr. James Stroud and Dr. Jeremy Blackwood among others for helping us move this forward.

The closing of Cardinal Stritch University has forced us to suspend the BA/MDiv program. It has been a great way to respond to the needs of our

sponsors. My dream is that we can find a way to offer it in association with a new partner. I also dream that we will be able to take advantage of the opportunities being presented by Stritch's closing to be the premier institution for the preparation of lay ministers for the Archdiocese.

For the future, I see also the eventual development of a DMin program that responds to actual pastoral and intellectual needs beyond a purely academic setting. Even so, it must be something that is different enough from other programs so that its viable and makes a needed contribution to the ministry of the Church.

In addition to continuing the annual Dehon and Lux Lectures, I see Sacred Heart needs to offer periodic symposia on timely topics, such as the one on Pope Francis just before I took over. We also have to make sure to open these events to the general public so that Sacred Heart is of greater service to the wider community and Church. This includes opening Sacred Heart to outside religious groups to use spaces for their particular needs as appropriate. We also need to continue offering sabbatical programs, retreats, and speakers.

I applaud the great initiative of expanding the ESL program from more than just learning English into the English and Cultural Studies (ECS) Program. And I want to see the bridge program which is part of this initiative promoted and developed more. It offers an appealing alternative to the traditional way of progressing through the educational system still in force.

And of course, I see that the Hispanic Ministry Preparation program needs to continue and also adapt to the changing reality of the Hispanic presence in the US Church and beyond. In this program we truly have the possibility of fostering bridges of understanding and mutual respect for those who are often excluded from the power structures within the Church and society. The Lux Center for Catholic-Jewish Studies also is an important element in this effort. In both of these programs the SCJ value



of promoting social justice is most evident and they're a good launching pad for this value to have greater influence within Sacred Heart.

Finally, I see that Sacred Heart can be a space where the concerns of the Church and society can meet and thus contribute to the furtherance of the reign of God in the world. All of you, including Kathy Harty with your long institutional memory, Lisa Oszewski, Jennifer Fischer, Caitlin Lewis, Fr. Mark Mastin, Edell Schaeffer, Dr. Michael Brummond, Dominic Fendt, Vicki Johnson, Maripat Zacher, Mary Reel, Fr. Jim Walters, Shannon McKeown, Paul Harty, Dr. Gary Klump, Dyan Barbeau, Fr. Anthony Lajato, soon-to-be Dr. Megan

Furman, Dr. Charles Hughes-Huff, Dr. David Zettel, Dr. Julie (Newberry), our adjuncts, our volunteers, Aaron Ryshkus and the Sodexo Staff, as well as Tom Weiss, Brandon Garavet and the Tech Joy staff, are all needed for us to further the reign of God in this space.

Truly Sacred Heart under the leadership of Fr. Tom Knoebel claimed a future with hope. I see my role as helping it to fulfill this hope, and so be more and more a place where all will see the face of God in us, and his life, vibrant and strong, coursing through all those associated with Sacred Heart. I am convinced that it is He who is moving among us, gently, leading, drawing us on into all that is new...and good...and lovely. For I believe that all He has in mind for us is good, that He desires life and not death for Sacred Heart. The signs of this are evident.

Sacred Heart is truly capable of healing a fractured world helping conform it to the heart of Christ. May we be apt instruments of His life and His salvation. And may Sacred Heart continue to make you proud to be a part of it, for Sacred Heart is your seminary. ■

HOMILY ■ Very Rev. Raúl Gómez- Ruiz SDS, *President-Rector*



RECTOR'S DAY, MONDAY
20TH WK OT (ST. PIUS X)

Earlier today I expressed my gratitude to you for being part of the mission of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. Now we come together to

celebrate this Holy Eucharist. For those who don't know, the word Eucharist is what the Church gives this celebration as its primary name.

The word "eucharist" comes from the Greek "eucharistía" made up of two words: "eu" (good) and "charistia" (grace). So literally "eucharistia" means "good grace." It's the word used in Scripture for thanks and praise. So we gather in this place for "eucharistía," to give thanks and praise to God who has convened us here and is forming us into a community; to give thanks and praise to God for the salvation and reconciliation he is providing us; to give thanks and praise to God for the graces he gives us through the holy sacrifice of the Mass; to give thanks and praise to God for the guidance he gives us through his word; to give thanks and praise to God for making us his partners in extending his reign into the world as instruments of his healing. But most importantly we give thanks and praise to God for loving us into life and for providing us a way to find the fullness of life he wants for us, eternal life, through our

communion in the body and blood of Christ.

Eternal life. Eternal life is where every longing, every desire, every need for more is satisfied because we become fully what God has intended for us all along. We know that. And yet, how easily we lose our way.

I have to say however, that the readings appointed for today are a bit grim in terms of this. They layout how people of faith can go astray so easily. Even the best, like the young man in the gospel passage, can lose their way (Mt 19:16-22): he apparently has done everything right but he's unable to let go and let God. In a way he's asking the perennial question: what's the meaning of life? He's done everything right. But, he doesn't realize that it's not about what he does but what God does. By selling, by divesting himself of all he possesses, he will find a greater treasure than his wants and needs, he will find the Lord and a new way of being.

On Tuesday last week, the new seminarians shared with me their vocation stories: that is, how and when they felt the call to pursue priesthood and what brought them to Sacred Heart at this time in their life. The stories they shared were moving and full of hope. As I pointed out to them, the telling of their vocation story is the recounting of their personal salvation history. They are sacred stories.

I also shared with them my own vocation story. But I forgot to tell them an important piece of that story. You see, I can relate to



the young man of the gospel in many ways. I too from my youth tried to do what was right and follow God. But at a certain point in my life, I began to question who Jesus Christ was and why I should believe in him.

I had a firm belief in God. All I had to do was look around me at creation and see that there was a greater power who had been involved in this reality and still was involved. Part of the reason I knew was because during college I participated in the Charismatic Movement and had seen the power of the Holy Spirit in others and in me. So I believed in God the Father and the Spirit. That was firm. But I questioned: how was Jesus both God and man and who could prove to me that he was the Savior?

As I was struggling with this question, I had a spiritual crisis that was affecting me and leading me to depression. On the outside I was doing very well. I had a good paying job, I was advancing in my career, I bought a house, I had a nice car...but I felt this emptiness inside. I wanted more and all my status, prosperity, and even my practice of religion, was unsatisfying.

In the midst of this crisis, I began to direct the Spanish choir of the parish where my sister was a member. Do you know what happens when you direct a church choir? You have to read the readings, think about the psalms, look at the prayer texts, and the hymns.

One day as I was preparing the music for Mass, all of a sudden it dawned on me! No one could prove to me that Jesus was God-Man, that he was the Savior. It was a matter of faith. I could either believe or not. I knew if I decided not to believe in Jesus, I would still be blessed by God,

I would still be his, as I had experienced before. I sensed God wouldn't give up on me. Just as God didn't give up on those people who rejected him. They were still his people as recounted in the reading from Judges (Jdgs 2:11-19).

So, I decided to believe in Jesus. Well, it felt like scales had fallen off my eyes and a burden had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt relief from my crisis. I also felt that I couldn't continue living as I was. I had to let go of the comforts I was enjoying and pursue the call I had heard as a 13-year-old. And that's when I joined the Salvatorians. Now 41 years later, I have no regrets, and, in my case, I have had a greater treasure than I would have had otherwise.

My brothers and sisters, each of your stories is sacred too. It's important to reflect on your stories. They are the story of who you are, the story of your faith, the story of how you got here, the story of when you heard God calling you to follow the way to find the true meaning of life. Recounting our stories help us to persevere. So share your stories with others.

God calls each of us every day. A big part of that call is to "Let Go and Let God." And he provides each of us with what is needed and what is most important: The treasure of his salvation that is to be shared with others through our loving service, in a myriad of forms. That is what we are all about here at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. And we thank and praise God for calling us here to participate in his salvation and to be instruments of his salvation, as we prepare evangelizing disciples through specialized formation to conform the world to the heart of Christ. ■

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