



*To the Community of Sacred Heart Seminary
and School of Theology
Hales Corners, Wisconsin*

I was pleased to greet a number of you at the General Audience of 6 March 2024, and I extend my prayerful good wishes to all the seminarians, clergy and lay faithful who form the community of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology. In particular, to you, dear seminarians, I want to offer some brief considerations on three realities essential to your preparation for priestly ministry in the Church: *prayer*, *fraternity* and *mission*.

Before all else is *prayer*. Just as Moses spoke with God face to face (cf. *Ex* 33:11), so in individual moments of prayer, as well as in the celebration of the sacraments, we encounter the loving presence of the Lord who gives us the grace to discover his will for our lives and strengthens us to bear hardships, carry out difficult and even unpleasant tasks and serve others with undivided hearts. I encourage you, then, to cultivate a profound relationship of communion with Jesus, one built upon the dialogue of daily prayer, both personal and liturgical, meditation on the word of God and especially time spent listening to him in silent adoration before the tabernacle. For the more we are united in this way to Christ the Good Shepherd, the more we become capable of bearing joyful witness to the hope and new life he brings.

The second reality I would mention is *fraternity*. Like the disciples whom Jesus chose to be with him (cf. *Mk* 3:14), your time

of seminary formation is an opportunity to deepen the spirit of communion with the Lord, with one another and with the Church, both local and universal. Indeed, the priestly ministry can never be individual, much less individualistic, for in the Church we help and support one another and are called to make our own contribution to the building up of the body of Christ (cf. *Eph* 4:12). It is important to remember that the Church is not a parliament, made up of political parties or factions. Instead, the Church is a great tapestry, in which the Holy Spirit brings together the many threads of peoples, cultures and languages, creating unity and indeed harmony from diversity. I invite you, then, in following the prompting of the Spirit, always to walk together in union with God, the Church as a whole, your Bishops, brother priests, consecrated men and women and the lay faithful and so make evident the fraternal love that is the hallmark of Jesus' disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:35).

Finally, *mission*. Dear seminarians, I am confident that the whole of your formation – human, spiritual, academic and pastoral – will prepare you to be missionary disciples who proclaim the Gospel by word and action in a spirit of evangelical charity. Amid the current challenges of conflict, division and widespread indifference to the needs of the most vulnerable, people in our societies – and I am thinking here especially of the young, the poor and the elderly – need us to listen to their dreams, questions and concerns so that we can better lead them to Jesus, who alone is the answer to the deepest longings of the human heart. I trust that in carrying out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy through various forms of the apostolate, as you are now doing and will continue to do after ordination, you

will be signs of a Church that goes forth (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20), sharing with everyone God's closeness, compassion and tender love.

Dear seminarians, I join you in giving thanks to God who has chosen you to follow him with generosity and courage along the path that leads to priestly ordination and pastoral service to his holy people. I commend all associated with Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology to the loving intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, and cordially impart my blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy and peace in the Lord.

Rome, from Saint John Lateran, 6 March 2024

Francis