

THE DISCIPLE

A SEMIANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE SEMINARIANS OF
SAINT JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY, MIAMI

THE PEOPLE LIVING IN DARKNESS HAVE
SEEN A GREAT LIGHT



**ST. JOHN VIANNEY
COLLEGE SEMINARY
& GRADUATE SCHOOL**



FRONT COVER. CHRISTOPHER CURRY (Philosophy III, Archdiocese of Nassau, The Bahamas) pictured in the midst of procession for the community's 40 Hour Devotion. Every semester, the community sets time aside to accompany our Lord day and night for 40 straight hours.

PHOTO: GABRIEL SEIGLIE/ ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

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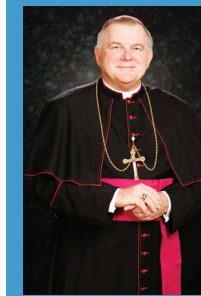


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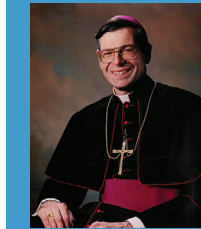
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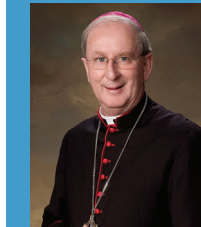
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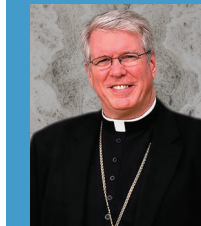
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FROM THE RECTOR

FRIENDSHIP WITH CHRIST BANISHES WORRY AND FEAR Our Community's Journey of Faith and Trust through the 'Wilderness' of Covid-19

"Cast yourself upon the Lord. Do not be afraid. He will not withdraw himself so that you will fall. Make that leap without anxiety. He will catch you." (St. Augustine)

THIS past August our community welcomed 30 new seminarians from the Archdiocese of Miami as well as seven other dioceses (St. Augustine, St. Petersburg, Orlando, Pensacola-Tallahassee, Venice, Palm Beach and Las Cruces). With the beginning of classes on the 24th of August, we began our family's journey through the 'wilderness' of the current pandemic, a band of disciples trusting in the Lord's promise of his abiding presence, relying on one another for support, encouragement, and a positive and upbeat spirit. And while it wasn't always easy - there certainly have been a number of bumps along the way - the semester has actually turned out to be an amazing journey of patience, perseverance, faith, resilience, and creativity!

This wasn't at all surprising though, given what we had gone through in the previous semester. For seven challenging yet ultimately grace-filled weeks from March to May, our community experienced something none of us had ever gone through before, something we will most likely never forget for the rest of our lives: our first-ever experience of sheltering-in-place because of a global pandemic. None of us thought it was going to be easy, of course. But with trust in the Lord and confidence in one another, the weeks turned out to be intensely spiritual weeks, especially since we got to celebrate Holy Week and the Triduum together. According to our resident priest-historian, the last time seminarians got to do Holy Week at St. John Vianney was in the early 70's.

During those seven weeks, the seminarians bonded in a way none of us expected. They prayed more, committed themselves more intensely to their studies, played, had nightly fellowship and sharing of graces, and enjoyed each other's company as they did their best to keep everyone safe. We even did a day-long community Spring-cleaning for the first time in many years. Those seven weeks turned out to be

truly tough and challenging, yet tremendously grace-filled, even if they didn't start out that way.

When our lockdown began on the 13th of March, none of us had any idea what to expect or how the lockdown would end, we only knew that we had to keep each other safe. If there was one word that probably captures the initial experience we had when we began our 7-week adventure together, it was "worry" - worry for our families, worry for our safety, worry for our health, worry for the world, worry for all those who would be affected, worry for all those who could die.

It was a very challenging beginning, at times, almost paralyzing. But one thing that guided and kept our community going throughout the first difficult days was yet another amazing experience, summed up in one word: "friendship" - friendship with one another as we shored up our defenses against the pandemic and kept each other safe, friendship with our loved ones at home with whom we kept in contact daily, and most of all, friendship with Jesus.

"Friendship with Jesus" - that was, after all, the refrain we kept repeating to ourselves even before the pandemic began. It is, after all, the point and purpose of everything we do here at St. John Vianney. We tell ourselves that, repeatedly. It's our sole orientation, the 'North Star' of the formation of our young seminarians, the only goal of the ministry of those of us tasked by the bishops to educate and guide them.

"Friendship with Jesus" - it's the only thing that drives away worry, the only thing that casts away fear, the only thing that keeps paralysis at bay, the only thing that bound our seminary family together, for seven challenging yet beautiful and grace-filled weeks which we will never forget for as long as we live.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me." (John 14:1)

Worry, after all, does absolutely nothing to help. In fact, all it does is mess us up, paralyzing us, making us lose confidence in ourselves, in our abilities, our talents, our skills - all of which have been given to us by God. Worry adds nothing to us, and in fact drains us of energy, of creativity, of life.

During our seven weeks of sheltering in place, we kept telling each other: we prepare for the worst, and hope for the best, and we trust in God's Providence and rely on one another. And so, we anticipated, we prepared, we kept ourselves awake and alert, refusing to simply react, but most of all, we depended on one another, we trusted in the Lord. It crowded out worry, it unleashed creativity, it increased our trust, it led us deeper into friendship with Christ and with each other.

A Christian author once said: "The cure for worry is to crowd it out of your head. Crowd it out with faith,

with confidence, and with trust: in yourself, in your abilities, and finally, in Christ who has conquered the world." A true disciple, one who has built a "friendship with the Lord," has absolutely, nothing to fear. He walks the way that isn't only "of Christ". He walks the way that "is" Christ.

"Cast yourself upon the Lord," says St. Augustine "do not be afraid. He will not withdraw himself so that you will fall. Make that leap without anxiety. He will catch you."

In a few more weeks, this semester too will come to a close, and so will our second adventure together as a seminary family through the 'wilderness' of Covid-19. Like the first one, this has turned out to be just as challenging, yet ultimately grace-filled - a journey of faith and trust, in the goodness of the Lord, one of growth in friendship with Him and with one another. We have been truly blessed.

Very Reverend Ferdinand R.S. Santos, Ph.D.
Rector-President



SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

Chasing God's Dreams

CARLOS LUZARDO

*Second-Year Pre-Theology
Archdiocese of Miami*

I was born and raised in Venezuela. For me, coming to Miami was really a dream. I even thought at times it would be unattainable. Today I look back at all the great steps and sacrifices it took to be here and understand that it all began at a moment when I felt most vulnerable, when my heart screamed, and I recognized that everything I craved was not to be found in anyone more than in God. This whole event was a “Yes” of love in response to an invitation to make a great leap over my own desires. Through prayer and continuous discernment, the support of my family, my best friends, and my community, I was able to make my dream a reality and unite it with the Will of God.

I came to Miami four years ago with many professional and personal dreams. However, I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was gaining some work experience while living a rather messy life that did not fill me or give me a clear sense of purpose. I guess I was “searching for happiness,” but today I understand this is only possible when we understand the meaning of loving.

My projects focused on getting a college degree, so I graduated with a degree in Management and Marketing. I also focused on looking for a good job to achieve my economic stability and then get married. I had never thought of the priesthood, or even really following God's Will. My family is very Catholic, and from a young age I attended Mass and studied at a Catholic school associated with a religious congregation. Thus, faith was very externally present in my life, although I did not find much personal meaning in it.

Once I got to this country I felt very alone. I decided to attend a men's Emmaus retreat at Our Lady of Guadalupe. I needed to begin again and to silence everything that did not make me happy. I needed to get to know my heart better. From there, I began to serve in my parish, became more involved, and deepened my faith. I felt like I had a new mission. This experience changed the way I thought. I was striving to be the best version of myself. The youth group ETM was a great support for me. Service and prayer were bringing my life new meaning, something that I had not experienced before, which invited me to a greater challenge every day. I was able to be an example to so many young people who had the same needs as me.

While all this was happening in my life, my dad was diagnosed with brain cancer, a stage IV glioblastoma. He became seriously ill. It was a real blow to me. He started treatment immediately seeking a way out of this illness. After two months of travel, he had to make some difficult decisions; he dedicated his life to God. My family had to leave the country in order for my Dad to endure a long procedure. His cancer was subdued, and I was very thankful. After this episode, many questions arose. I had left everything to go be with my family. Now I was back and ready to start over. Life had changed, and this whole experience had come very close to foreshadowing me in the Lord. And even though my dad's not here today, he gave me the greatest support.

I haven't experienced anything as extraordinary as prayer and my own reflection when I realized that perhaps the priesthood was my way. I had come across a thought that would not leave my mind. However, there were many doubts and fears: Is it good for me? What of my life,



studies, and plans? Is it possible? Would I be able to turn myself in like this? Today I understand that those who are called by Him are able to overcome everything and live with love and joy. And although the training process has its human challenges, I understood that if I wanted to discover what was best for me, I should launch myself and forget about my safety. Only the man who's sure he won't break when the world shows itself blind to what He offers, only those who face everything and are able to respond with a “Yes” can be able to hear what He has for us. At that moment I understood that the truth of the world is not for me, but to give it to others.

Easter in Lockdown



ARI LIMA

Second-Year Pre-Theology
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AFTER being quarantined in the seminary for almost the entirety of Lent, due to the coronavirus outbreak, we celebrated the Easter Vigil Mass at St. John Vianney (6 feet apart of course). Normally, all of the seminarians would have been home for Easter break, or serving in parishes, but due to the circumstances, many parishes were closed for Holy Week, and we were asked to stay in seminary. Thus, the entire Easter Triduum was celebrated as a closed-in community. It was the first time Easter Mass had been celebrated here at St. John Vianney since the 1970's. I am writing this reflection because it was one of the most beautiful and prayerful celebrations of the liturgy that I have been a part of. I want to preserve this memory for myself and others by attempting to write down the experience.

Shortly before Mass started, the evening of Holy Saturday, a storm was brewing in our neighborhood in Westchester, Miami. By sunset, a torrential down-pour began, accompanied by some heavy thunder and lightning nearly striking the buildings of our campus. It was one of those storms with hardly any delay between the flashes and crashes. Of course, the whole of Lent had been as dry as a desert, and we were even joking that if a candle fell, it would light the whole lawn on fire because the grass was so dried and brown. However, at the conclusion of Lent, it seemed "the flood" from Genesis was coming down upon Westchester. It certainly made up for the lack of holy water.

THE ENTRANCE PROCESSION:

While the storm was still raging outside, we made our way over to the chapel around 8 o'clock in the evening. I was under the slim cover that connects the new refectory to St. Raphael's chapel. I was walking quickly as thunder peeled to the left and right, and my cassock was being sprayed as the wind drove the rain sideways through the columns of the walkway. As dark as it was outside, it was even darker once inside the chapel. Upon entering, I could vaguely make out the shadows of everyone standing in the pews. Not a single light was on, and you could only see flickers of lightning spread through the panels of stained glass near the ceiling. As I turned the corner from the chapel wing, I saw a small fire burning just outside the glass doors at the front entrance.



As part the Easter Vigil rite, a fire is kept outside the Church which is used to light the Easter Candle. The candle had a metallic cross and the year "2020" stamped underneath it. It was lit by our seminary rector, Fr. Ferdi, then processed in by Fr. Dan Martin, one of the new faculty members, and also the youngest priest in the community. This candle was the only light shining in the darkened building, representing Christ descending into darkness to bring forth light and life once again to souls. The seminarians at the end of each pew lit their own candle from the fire of the Easter candle, then passed on the fire to those standing around us. As the light is shared and divided, it does not weaken but in fact intensifies.

I was standing at the far end of the fourth pew and noticed our reflections holding the little candles in the glass windows next to me. I thought of the souls who were celebrating this Mass with us from the other side of life, the faithful departed and the communion of saints. The now fifty plus lit candles illumined St. Rafael's Chapel with a warm and soft golden glow. Each person's facial features were made just distinguishable enough by the small candle they held in front of them. I beheld God within each person, his light shining on their faces from the outside, yet somehow emanating out from within. The greatest gift we have is the divine spark of God's life within us. We ourselves are not God, but He is our Creator and the source of life whom dwells within us.



“May the light of Christ rising in glory dispel the darkness of our hearts and minds.”

EASTER IN THE SEMINARY

THE READINGS AND PSALMS:

The readings of the Easter Vigil (9 in total) recount salvation history. It is our history as God’s creation, our history as mankind, and our personal history of experiencing the mystery of God revealed in our life. This includes the good and the sad, the magnificent blessings and the difficult trials, sometimes brought about by our poor decisions and waywardness. We encounter God, His wisdom, His majesty, and His mercy at special moments throughout our life because He is always searching for us, inviting us to turn back with all our hearts, to let go of what weighs us down, and to embrace Him as our Creator, source of all life, and the One who knows us best.

The small candles were extinguished for us to better meditate on the divine revelation and mysteries proclaimed in the scriptures. As the chapel faded into darkness again, the readings began from the podium. Gabriel Seiglie, a local seminarian from Miami, read the first reading from the creation account in Genesis. His strong but clear, bass-filled voice had the perfect pace and tone of narrator. The thunder continued to roll, although slightly softer now, outside the chapel walls as he reminded us of the first moments of creation and the relationship between God and man, “in the beginning.” I reflected on some of my earliest memories as a child, squeezing fresh orange juice with my father from fruit we just picked while walking barefoot in the backyard, fishing on a boat for the first time with my family while being fascinated with countless shimmers of sunlight reflected off the ripples on the water’s surface. These were precious and innocent memories from my own beginning and entrance into God’s creation.

Between each of the readings a Psalm was chanted by Adam Cahill and Stephen Eschenfelder; their well-trained voices ranging from bass to tenor, turning each note into a small prayer. Due to the unique architecture of the chapel walls, the voices, as great as they naturally sounded, climbed up the 3-story walls, were further tuned, amplified and reverberated. The echo poured down as an ethereal sound over the people in the nave and pews.

The second reading was read in Tagalog, a native language of the Philippines, by Jose Cortez from the diocese of St. Augustine. This was a surprise for most of us who had never heard Tagalog before. It was a reminder of the universality of The Catholic Church. The name “Catholic” literally means Universal. There are 1.2 billion Catholics spread throughout the world, each belonging to a unique culture and language, yet acknowledging the

Kingship of Christ and the authority of the Church that He founded. The reading recounted the call of Abraham, a man living in a prosperous ancient city, who was called out by God to live differently from the world he was a part of, and to trust in Providence. We too are called to live differently. Not all influences of the world are good. We must hear the voice of God among many others and chose to trust His, and His alone.

The third reading was read by Woody Gibson from the diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. The book of Exodus, one of the oldest books of the Bible, speaks of the miraculous liberation of the Israelites from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Sometimes, God asks us to trust in what we don’t completely understand for our own good. Even though there are trials in life, how many times has he led us to safety, health, freedom, even under dire circumstances? I remembered listening the stories of my grandparents fleeing from the communist revolution in Cuba. How they and many others escaped and landed safely in the U.S. was truly miraculous.

The fourth reading was read by Rikinson Bantou from Haiti. He read in French from the book of Isaiah, recalling God’s mercy on his people: *“Though the mountains fall away and the hills be shaken, My love shall never fall away from you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the LORD, who has mercy on you” (Isaiah 54:10)*. Jacob Gwenn from the Diocese of Venice read the Fifth reading from Isaiah chapter 55, predicting the new covenant, the new kingdom, and new life with God. Paul Ciulei, from Romania, read the sixth reading from Baruch in Italian: *“Had you walked in the way of God, you would have dwelt in enduring peace. Learn where prudence is, where strength, where understanding; That you may know also where are length of days, and life, where light of the eyes, and peace” (Baruch 3:13-14)*. While listening to this reading, I began to reflect again. It was a reminder that we, the Church, are God’s chosen people. We know what pleases God, for he has told us, and we must listen to Him to find true peace. Mark DeSio from the diocese of St. Petersburg read the 7th reading from Ezekiel 36. This reading made me stop and realize that although we have gone astray, been unfaithful, God is always faithful and keeps his promise of mercy if we turn to Him.

By this time, the storm had stilled. It was calm again outside. Once the last of the Old Testament readings had concluded, the bells in the sanctuary were rung continuously for several minutes to signify the arrival of the New



Covenant, the New Testament revealed through the person of Jesus Christ. At this point in the Mass, there was a flickering of light under each of the banners lining the chapel walls. Saints Peter, Paul, Lawrence, and Stephen appeared on giant tapestries facing each other from opposite sides of the room. The glow intensified and the spotlight directly aimed at the altar turned on, bringing about the full brightness of the chapel and brought the enormous mural above the sanctuary to life. The face of Christ etched in the mural has captivated me since my first visit to the seminary. It is the face of authority, but an authority you can trust. You want to be led by that man. With him you feel safe. The St. Rafael Bell tower rang continuously outside for all of Westchester, reminding the people why this night is different from all other nights.

Daniel Araujo from Venezuela read the epistle to the Romans in Spanish reminding us, *“If then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:8-11)*.

Then came the triple: “Alleluia, Alleluia, ALLELUIA!” It is a word that means “praise God.” It’s a word I had not really understood until the Lenten retreat I attended last year in Gainesville. A missionary from Bangalore, India flew all the way to Gainesville to give a four-day retreat about “Victory in Jesus” at St Augustine’s parish. During

the retreat I understood what it meant to praise and worship God with his own Spirit. It is to thank Him from the bottom of my heart, with His own love and power inside me, for all He has done and will do for us. I remember a nun once saying, “There are not enough eternities to thank Him for what he has done for us”. That is why we continue to celebrate Mass every day with joy, and can worship God with help from His grace.

After the “Alleluia,” Father Ferdi proclaimed the Gospel from Matthew: *“Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, approached, rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing was white as snow. The guards were shaken with fear of him and became like dead men. Then the angel said to the women in reply, “Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.” Then they went away quickly from the tomb, fearful yet overjoyed, and ran to announce this to his disciples. And behold, Jesus met them on their way and greeted them. They approached, embraced his feet, and did him homage” (Matthew 28:1- 10)*.

JESUS IS ALIVE. He has been raised, just as he said.

EASTER IN THE SEMINARY

THE LITURGY OF THE THE EUCHARIST:

The renewal of Baptismal vows followed, which then flowed into the Communion Rite and Liturgy of the Eucharist. Five seminarian altar servers holding candles and incense, and four priests surrounded the altar at the moment of consecration, bringing us back to the night of the Last Supper, when Jesus, surrounded by his apostles at the table, shared with them (and now us) his own Body and Blood. He is The Lamb of God who is sacrificed for the sins of the world. He is Emmanuel, “God with us.” He is truly with us. The Christian life is full of many mysteries, yet God has provided us many reasons to believe. He created with harmony, order, and reason, but He asks us to trust in the mysteries taking place in the sacraments. He gives us His peace, the gift of faith, as well as His Spirit to understand that it is His very life in the Eucharist. He does this that we may not fear anything at all, not even death, for today Christ is Risen.

As the Mass concluded, Father Ferdi told us that this was his second time as presider over the Easter Vigil Mass. The first, he described as rushed and somewhat poorly prepared by those whom he was celebrating with. Perhaps, this was his first time properly presiding over the Easter Mass in 22 years of the Priesthood. I know for him and

for us, it is something we will never forget. “*How I have eagerly desired to share this Passover meal with you before I suffer*” (Lk 22:15).

I do not know why we were especially privileged this year to witness and participate in such a spectacular liturgy, with such grace and profound prayerful moments, while millions of people were sadly not even able attend Mass, or celebrate with friends and family as in years past. But perhaps, there is a hidden grace in this very difficult time for the children of God. Perhaps, we the future priests of the Church are being encouraged to more deeply, more fully appreciate and embrace our calling through this experience. For others, maybe it will lead to a clearer understanding that something very important is missing. We all have a deep longing for God that desires to be satisfied in eternity. May we quench our spiritual thirst and return to Him with all our hearts, seeking and finding his presence every day. He is always drawing us closer to himself, until that Day, when we will meet Our Lord face to face.



PHOTO: Gabriel Campos / ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY



Why In-Person?

The Importance of Being Present at the Celebration of the Liturgy

REV. JORGE I. PERALES

Director of Liturgy and Professor of Liturgy and Sacred Scripture

THE Catechism of the Catholic Church (1071), echoing Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (11), states: "As the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church. It makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men. It engages the faithful in the new life of the community and involves the "conscious, active, and fruitful participation" of everyone." The liturgy as "work of Christ" and also action of his Body, which is the Church, of which he is the head (Ephesians 1:22-23), involves the individual members of the Church united not only with Christ but also with each other. Thus participation in the liturgy is not an individual act of personal worship and individual prayer, but the individual praying and worshiping within a community of believers in union with Christ who has said: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Gathering in the name of Christ, thus being physically present, is essential not only for the celebration of the sacraments which are celebrated in the Church's liturgy but also for receiving the grace of the sacrament.

Pope Benedict XVI in the General Audience of October 3, 2012 explains this very well when he says: "Looking at the example which Jesus taught us, the Pater Noster [Our Father], we see that the first word [in Latin] is 'Father' and the second is 'our'. Thus the answer is clear, I learn to pray, I nourish my prayer by addressing God as Father and praying-with-others, praying with the Church, accepting the gift of his words which gradually become familiar to me and full of meaning." Pope Benedict continues: "Therefore it is the 'total Christ', the whole Community, the Body of Christ united with her Head, that is celebrating. Thus the liturgy is not a sort of 'self-manifestation' of a community; it means instead coming out of merely 'being ourselves', being closed in on ourselves, and having access to the great banquet, entering into the great living community in which God himself nourishes us."

One must be present in order to attend Mass and receive Communion as well as in order to fulfill the Sunday

obligation. A couple must be present together with the priest, deacon, or bishop as well as their two witnesses in order to receive the sacrament of matrimony. The penitent must be present with some physical proximity to the priest not only to make confession but in order to receive absolution. The same applies to the other sacraments and liturgical services because they are true actions of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit "make present efficaciously the grace that they signify" (CCC 1084). It is the Holy Spirit who "by his transforming power", "makes the mystery of Christ present here and now" (CCC 1092). One can truly enter the mystery of Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit when one is present at the actual celebration of the Sacred Mysteries; when one enters in intimate relation with the events of salvation which are not only being remembered, but actualized and made present by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. (CCC 1104).

The Church's liturgy is not an individual isolated act but a sacred action in which one participates, always bringing our individual self to the gathered community, gathered with and in Christ and through him praying to the Father, united in and by the Holy Spirit. Yet there are times in which a person or whole groups of faithful Christians are unable to gather for the sacramental celebration of the Mass or the other sacraments or other liturgical services. The reasons are varied but the response should be the same: one unites spiritually with the celebration of the Mass or other liturgical services, such as the Liturgy of the Hours or exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and spiritually unites in prayer with the priest and all those present, gathered for the celebration. This, of course, is not the same as being present, as explained above, nor does it overlook the need to be present at the liturgy most especially to receive any of the sacraments.

Not being able to be present at the liturgical celebration has become a reality for many during the trying situation due to the pandemic caused by the Corona virus. Pope Francis addressed this reality in his homily during the celebration of the daily Mass at Santa Marta on April 17, 2020. The



Pope said:

"This pandemic that has made us all communicate, even religiously, through the means of communication. Even this Mass, we are all communicants, but not together, we are spiritually together. The people gathered are few. There is a large number of people: we are together, but not together. The Sacrament too: today you receive the Eucharist, but the people linked up with us, only spiritual communion. And this is not the Church: this is the Church in a difficult situation, which the Lord permits, but the ideal of the Church is always with the people and with the Sacraments. Always."

The Pope expresses the sadness of not being able for all to be together, present at the altar of the Lord, as he says: "we are together, but not together."

Following the Mass and other liturgical services by way of technological means is not the same. It does allow us to see and hear the liturgy but even when we pray in union with those there, it is not the same as being there. It is never the ideal and never can any of the sacraments be received this way. Pope Francis further explains, "The Church, the sacraments, the people of God are concrete. It is true that in this moment we must provide this familiarity with God in this way, but so as to come out of the tunnel, not to stay inside it."

The five Metropolitan Archbishops of England and Wales

in their letter "A People who hope in Christ", Easter 2020, address the same issue. They state: "While the live-streaming of the Mass and other devotions is playing an important part in maintaining the life of faith, there is no substitute for Catholics being able to physically attend and participate in the celebration of the Mass and the other sacraments. Our faith is expressed powerfully and beautifully though 'seeing, touching, and tasting.'"

We can ask "why is this so?" The Catechism (1067-1068) sheds light on this statement of the five archbishops and can answer our question. "[T]he church celebrates in the liturgy above all the Paschal Mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation. It is this mystery of Christ that the Church proclaims and celebrates in her liturgy so that the faithful may live from it and bear witness to it in the world."

Regarding the sacrament of Penance, Archbishop Leonard Blair of Hartford, CN, Chairman of the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship, after the Vatican having been consulted, wrote in a March 27th memo to the bishops of the United States:

"With regard to Penance, it is clear that the Sacrament is not to be celebrated via cell phone,"
"In addition, in the present circumstances cell phones should not be used even for the amplification of voices between a confessor and penitent who are in visual range of

each other. Current threats against the seal of confession also raise questions about information on cell phones,”

Archbishop Blair further states:
“With regard to the Anointing of the Sick, it is not possible for the anointing with oil to be delegated to someone else, such as a nurse or doctor.” This sacrament is always reserved to be administered only by the priest or the bishop.

By way of conclusion, we can once again listen to the words of Pope Francis during his homily during the Mass of April 17, 2020 in Santa Marta:
“The Church, the sacraments, the people of God are concrete. It is true that in this moment we must provide this familiarity with God in this way, but so as to come out of the tunnel, not to stay inside it.

... This familiarity with the Lord, of Christians, is always in community. Yes, it is intimate, it is personal, but within the community. A familiarity without community, a familiarity without bread, a familiarity without the Church, without the people, without the sacraments, is dangerous. It can become, let’s say, a gnostic familiarity, a familiarity for me by myself, detached from the people of God.”

And the words of Pope Benedict during the General Audience of October 3, 2012:
“God acts through Christ and we can act only through and in him. The conviction must grow within us every day that the liturgy is not our or my “doing” but rather is an action of God in us and with us.”



SEMINARY SNAPSHOT



PHOTO: CARLOS LUZARDO / ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

Every semester, the entire campus drops everything to participate in 40 Hours Devotion. This event consists of a Eucharistic Procession around the entire campus, 40 hours of uninterrupted Eucharistic Adoration, and a blessing of the seminarians and grounds of the seminary.

SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

Surrendering to the Father's Will

.....
LANDON McCOLLUM

*First-Year Pre-Theology
Diocese of St. Augustine*
.....



ENTERING seminary at thirty-two years old, I consider myself to be a late vocation. I will be around forty at ordination. Up until now, I have lived a full life. I've had a career as a merchant mariner working on drilling rigs. I had a second (shorter) career as a registered nurse. I've been a home owner. I've buried a close friend. I've lived with the poor and fought for the poor in Romania. Powerfully, I have fallen deeply in love, and I also know too well the experience of rejected love. It has been a soul-searching adventure. You may say, "After all that experience, you should have figured it out by now." I say, "I have figure it out." Love is the meaning of life, and the way to love best is to do the Will of God. Even better, to live in the Will of God. If this is your aim, the outcome is always Love and souls saved.

We humans sometimes imagine our biography as our identity or sometimes our occupation as our identity. We build the narratives of our lives on these terms. But we are more textured, mysterious and beautiful than these terms can possibly capture. Occupation is merely a setting for the play. If we conceptualize ourselves in these terms, we run the risk of boxing ourselves into something less than a child of God. Rather, what's primary is our relationship with God. How do we love Him, serve Him, and know Him? If we conceptualize ourselves on these terms, we can find the meaning of our lives on other fronts too; such as the quality of our relationships, the authenticity of our witness and so on. This is what I have done with my life. I made God first in everything and held everything else as nothing but a trifle. Externally it looks strange. I seem to switch jobs too often. I never have a girlfriend. Family members think I'm cheap. Charities think I am loaded. My socks rarely match. I spend a lot of time in nature, a lot of time in Church, and I always seem



to seek out the friendships of holy old ladies often called "prayer warriors." I am not suggesting this is how you ought to be. This is simply my story.

Anyone who has done St. Louis de Montfort's consecration to Jesus through the heart of Mary knows that his life is not his own anymore, at least if you took it seriously. It is the same with me. My life is not my own anymore. This has been my experience for quite some time. Over the years I have come to hear God's voice in the silence of my heart, and also, I can intuit His Will. When this divine intuition occurs, I do not hesitate to allow the Lord to have His full life in me. If this means a career change or a pilgrimage or a conversation with a scary looking character on the street, I go.

I ended up in seminary by this same sort of way. Last November, I quit my job as a nurse and set out to ride my bicycle across the country and then up the California coast. It was supposed to be a solo pilgrimage, but two young Catholic guys heard about my journey and joined me. I didn't have a single day alone for four months, but I enjoyed the company. We pedaled across the country (Florida to California) attending daily Mass, hopping from church to church. It was interesting. When it was all

done and the COVID lockdowns kicked in, I flew home. After I recollected for a few days, I had to look in the mirror and ask, “What now Lord?” I had zero desire to be a Catholic priest, but it simply made sense in my intuition. I could feel the Father’s Will in my heart. So, I sat down at the computer and typed up my autobiography for the Diocese of St. Augustine. I went to the vocations director and told him, “I have no desire to be a priest, but I know it is what God wants.” He told me that it was “okay to be this way” and that the council will help me make my decision. Sure enough, the council decided that I was a good candidate for seminary. It was an uncomfortable adjustment at first, but after a couple of months and some discernment, it appears that the Lord has been preparing me for this my entire life. The vocation fits like a glove. I never wanted it on my own. Marriage seemed like a good idea to me, but the Creator knows best!

I don’t question the Father’s Will anymore. Sure, sometimes I raise my eyebrows at what He wants, but I just go. This spirituality partially comes from seeing just how miserable things can go when I do my will. I have tried doing things my way thousands of times and I tend to agree with St. Augustine. He says the human will “is the cause of all evils.” He says this in his book, “On Free Choice of the Will.” The Servant of God, Luisa Piccarreta, has written volumes on this topic too. This spirituality of surrendering to the Divine Will and denying the human will may just lead to one more priest (me) for the Kingdom of God in Florida. FIAT!



New Student Experience





Blessing of the Cassocks



THE BLESSING OF THE CASSOCKS is normally a subtle affair. A new seminarian, after some time has passed in residence, receives his cassock and surplice as a sign of fully joining the community in prayer and daily living. However, in the midst of this pandemic, a refocus has emerged on the things sometimes overlooked here at seminary, including the reception of these garments.

Technically speaking, the black cassock is merely an optional garment worn by clerics and those training to be clerics during the service of liturgy and everyday life. At first glance, a seminarian wearing a cassock may appear to be attempting to mimic that which he hopes to become: a priest. However, this idea does not fully encompass the purpose of why one chooses to wear a cassock.

When putting on the white surplice (reserved for liturgical celebrations), seminarians pray, “Indue me, Domine, novum hominem, qui secundum Deum creatus est in iustitia et sanctitate veritatis,” or in the vernacular, “Invest me, O Lord, as a new man, who was created by God in justice and the holiness of truth.” This is the perfect synopsis of what wearing a cassock truly represents.

The cassock is not simply a garment that once worn changes a man immediately into someone ready to be a priest. It does not even signal that someone is closer to being a priest. Rather, the garment signifies and serves as a reminder for what that man is attempting to be – not just a man serving Christ, but a **NEW** man **IN** Christ. The cassock is a constant reminder for a seminarian to be in a state of perpetual prayer with God, so that he may change not only in appearance, but in essence, into the man God desires to serve His Church.



STEPHEN PARKER
First-Year Pre-Theology
Diocese of St. Augustine



The Voice of God:

The Music of the Church



WILL STRASSBERGER
*Fourth-Year Philosophy
Diocese of St. Augustine*

THE LEGEND

A white dove descends upon Pope Gregory I and perches on his shoulder. The heavenly bird leans in, whispering a sweet and new music to the saint. Gregory writes down this sacred music and for centuries this glorious chant has permeated liturgies the world over.

This legend may embellish the truth behind the inception of Gregorian Chant, but it nevertheless stresses the gravity of the chant itself. Indeed, the Gregorian style has been chanted by the Church for more than half of her entire history, giving life to the Divine Office and reflecting the light of Christ in the Mass.

THE HISTORY

What began as a simple method of intoning prayers for the liturgy gradually became the sacred and structured form of chant promulgated by Saint Gregory the Great in the sixth and seventh centuries. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, Gregorian Chant accompanied the liturgy and served as the foundation of Western music. Even today the Gregorian style remains the official chant unique and proper to the Church.

CONTROVERSY

St. Augustine wrote in his Confessions that music has the dangerous tendency to ensnare the senses to a point where melody rivals or outranks the content of the text. For this reason, there was a great controversy surrounding the early days of chant. What if the music were to detract from the word of God? Pope Gregory realized the good that could come out of breathing life into scriptures through music and so promoted the widespread use of chant.

While the Second Vatican Council affirms that Gregorian Chant holds primacy in the Church’s liturgical music, the lack of enforcement by the clergy and liberties taken by musicians have led to a deviation from chant and an embrace of more popular music. These fashionable songs may lead people to God and this is good in itself, but we must not forget the chant of St. Gregory. Fourteen centuries of cultivating and developing this chant has left the Church with a strong and incredibly rich tradition of sacred music.

Pope Saint Pius X, in his 1903 instruction on sacred music, *Tra le Sollecitudini*, states that the qualities of beauty, universality, and sanctity which comprise sacred music are most clearly exemplified in Gregorian Chant. The saintly pope writes, “The more closely a composition for church approaches in its movement, inspiration and savour the Gregorian form, the more sacred and liturgical it becomes; and the more out of harmony it is with that supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple.”

THE MUSIC

Composers of chant wrote long phrases in order to fully complete scriptural readings. While popular songs today feature short and catchy melodies, the Gregorian style elaborates on the text, taking its time to carefully and reverently express the inspired word of God.

The technique of text painting was developed to literally convey the text in music. For example, if the text reads “Glory to God in the highest,” the syllable “high” may be sung as the highest note in the melody. Or as the text reads “Lord have mercy,” the word “mercy” may be drawn out to show God’s inexhaustible mercy for us.

Another characteristic of Gregorian Chant is how the melodies reflect the emotions of the text. In other words, when the text is sad, the music is sad. Some of the melodies of Gregorian Chant have become so identified with a particular emotion that the music is now universalized in our popular culture.

THEMES

Perhaps the most famous example of this is the “*Dies Irae*.” Literally translated as the “day of wrath,” this chant was sung at funeral masses and is about the final judgement. The first eight notes of this chant are now so associated with death that the theme occurs in several movies when a character dies or is in danger: Simba running from the stampede in *The Lion King*, George Bailey praying on the bridge in *It’s a Wonderful Life*, Luke returning to his dead aunt and uncle in *Star Wars*, etc.

The real allure of chant is what happens when the cantor sings a phrase of music that is bound by the meticulous



characteristics of the Gregorian style in a manner that sounds absolutely free of constraint, a listless melody wandering the aisles of a chapel.

The origin of the Gregorian style is plainchant, a monophonic texture in which one melody is sung without any other notes or chords. Part of the appeal of Gregorian Chant for singers is the prospect of being able to chant an entire song alone and acapella thanks to monophony. But where two or three are gathered, something remarkable happens.

In the lofty stone chapels of ages past, the singers in the choir loft would chant one phrase of a certain part of the Mass after another, often times ending the first phrase on one note and beginning the second on another note. The difference between these two notes creates what is called an interval of a perfect fourth or perfect fifth.

INTERVALS

Sing to yourself “*Here Comes the Bride*.” The interval between the “here” and “comes” is a perfect fourth. Now sing “*Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*.” The interval between the two “twinkles” is a perfect fifth.

In these chapels, the acoustics allowed the first phrase to sustain its sound well into the second phrase. When musicians heard the two pitches at the same time, they began to write chant specifically for two voices. The first voice chanted the melody, while the second voice added harmony a perfect fourth or a perfect fifth above the melody.

This style of chant is called Organum; it was developed in the ninth century and was used to chant the Divine Office and the parts of the Mass.

THE SCIENCE

Each note has a designated frequency, or vibrating speed, measured in hertz (Hz). When two notes are sung in perfect harmony, their frequencies combine and produce another note: the sum of the two frequencies. This is called a combination tone, sometimes referred to an overtone. If a cantor sings the note A at 220 Hz and a harmonizer sings the note E at 330 Hz, the note produced would be the sum at 550 Hz (C#). And so, with only two notes being sung, a major chord of three notes is heard.

Enter now that glorious marriage betwixt faith and reason, between science and religion that flourishes so fully in Catholicism. Imagine that you are a simple monk or nun singing the hymn for Lauds in community with your confreres. In the chapel of a monastery or convent, you would sing the word of God in two part Organum, and with your precise harmonies you would hear notes that nobody in the hall was singing. It would sound like the choirs of Heaven had decided to join you in your morning prayer, as if by practicing Gregorian Chant you had intoned the voice of God.



SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

ESTEBAN MERKT

*Fourth-Year Philosophy
Diocese of St. Augustine*

HAVING come to my final year in seminary I am simply amazed by how fast my time here has flown by. I look at the photos of the young, fresh-faced kid who walked in here, and I ask myself, “How did I end up here?” which is a fair question when you look at my life. I first felt called to the priesthood when I was six years old, after having been drafted into serving at Mass by my grandfather who was a sacristan at his local parish. Spending my summers at my grandparents’ house in Puerto Rico, it was the only way to get out of the house during the weekday! So, every evening I’d go to Mass with my grandfather and altar serve. Afterwards, while the priests played the sacristans in dominos, one of the

priests would slip me a quarter for a scoop of ice cream.

I have moved fourteen times in the last twenty-two years, and I have lived or spent time in at least three different continents. Throughout all of this moving, the thing that kept me most grounded was my Catholic faith. It’s not always easy adjusting to a new environment, although my family and I were quite accustomed to it. That being said, I knew how to serve the Mass, and I was quite comfortable as an altar boy. Around the third grade, my parents made the decision to pull me and my sister out of school in order to homeschool us, using a program called Seton Homeschool. This actually allowed us, as a family, to grow deeper in our faith as the whole school program revolved around the Church’s teachings. We began going to daily Mass and learning more about our Catholic faith, and eventually I started altar serving at daily Mass as well.

By the time I was a freshman in high school, altar-serving became just as significant in my life as sports. I would often serve two to three Masses on the weekend on top of the weekly schedule. By the age of sixteen, I was one of five Master of Ceremonies at my parish in charge of organizing, supervising, and training over one hundred altar boys. Around this time, I started thinking about what I was going to do for college and what I wanted to do with my life. At the time, I was considering a number of different fields, but I really felt drawn to the military as well as the priesthood. One of my closest friends in high school, who came from a big military family, asked me if I’d ever considered the

military chaplaincy. After looking into it, I felt inspired by the lives of Father Vincint Capadonno and Father Emil Kaupaun, two Catholic chaplains who gave their lives for their country and the souls under their command in the Korean and Vietnam war, respectively. There was something about their sense of duty, not just to their country, but especially to those men who fought bravely and would otherwise have no way of receiving the sacraments. To that end, I began the process to formally enter into the United States Navy and, God willing, one day become a Chaplain of the United States Chaplain Corps. Please keep me and especially priests already serving as chaplains in our Armed Forces in your prayers.





Photo by Scott S. Smith | St. Augustine
The National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche in St. Augustine, FL is the oldest Marian Shrine in America.



FILIPPO SCHIAVO
*Fourth-Year Philosophy
Diocese of St. Augustine*

HERE in seminary, all of us are in different walks in our faith journey. Some of us are new to seminary formation and have just experienced Our Lord in an intimate way. Others have been walking with the Lord for many years. In us all, however, there is a desire to grow closer to Our Lord, a desire to go deeper and become more united to Our Lord and, God-willing, serve His church as priests. I think it is safe to say that no matter what our age or where we are in our formational journey, the common ground amongst all of us is a desire to grow to be more

Christ-like. There is no one more perfect to get to know if we desire unity with Our Lord than the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was totally open and unconditional in her "Yes" to God. We are all called to follow her and in the same way abandon our lives to God as she did. Here at St. John Vianney, we begin our journey with a fundamental question from which all growth can happen: Do we desire to get to know Christ more deeply? If we can honestly say with a resounding "Yes!" than we ought to follow the sure and secure way to holiness – getting to know and following the path of the first apostle, Jesus' Mother.

In the Church's rich tradition, the Blessed Mother takes on many different titles and depictions. Each one of these images of the Blessed Mother depicts an aspect of her intercession and truly brings to life the words of Paul in his first let-

ter to Corinthians "I have become all things to all men." (1 Corinthians 9: 22) The Blessed Virgin Mary takes on these many diverse and unique depictions as a means of being an exemplar to all Christians in their specific time and place. She meets us where we are, how we are, and invites us as one among us to follow Her son, Jesus.

Growing up in St. Augustine, Florida, I grew up having a personal devotion to the Blessed Mother under the title of Nuestra Señora de la Leche y Buen Parto (Our Lady of the Milk and Safe Delivery) who's National Shrine is in the city of St. Augustine. This devotion is special to the state of Florida and to the United States for many reasons. Personally, the image of Our Lady nursing the Child Jesus is dear to me because growing up my mom would take my siblings and me to

the shrine weekly for prayer. Due to its rich Catholic heritage, the location of the shrine on the Mission de Dios grounds is perhaps the "most sacred acre in America," at least according to President John F. Kennedy who made the statement after a visit to these holy grounds in St. Augustine.

Who is Our Lady of la Leche and how is she relevant in the faith of Catholics not just in Florida but all over the Americas? The story of how she arrived here is one that goes all the way back to the colonization of our country. When we look back at the numerous failed attempts to colonize America, we see the many conflicts between the Europeans and the native Indians. We know of many voyages of the Europeans landing in Florida but dying out very quickly. It took a great deal of time to simply settle here. But it was not impossible – we know Pedro Menéndez on September 8th, 1565 landed on shore in the Mission Grounds of St. Augustine with Fr. Lopez and his crew and celebrated Mass to give thanks to God for a safe voyage. Over the next 150 years, the settlement of St. Augustine, named because on August 28th the feast of St. Augustine they had first seen land, was vibrant with the Catholic faith, and many of the natives were converted.

As one reads the history of the colonization of Florida, originally the Jesuits were the group of priests sent to help share the faith in the New World. Records show groups of Jesuits coming to the New World and dying off with little success. Because of the failed attempts, in 1595, the Franciscans took initiative and came to the New World seeking to share the faith from Spain. The Franciscans (those who follow the rule of St. Francis) were exactly what was needed to share the faith with the local Florida Indians. Their love of nature and animals was a common ground for them and the natives, their vow of poverty made them able to meet the humble Indians right where they were at, and their simple brown garb made them very approachable. It was through the Spanish Franciscans that Our Lady of la Leche came to the New World. While the exact date is not known or on which voyage she came, it was through these humble priests that devotion to Our Lady took root in our country. She is the oldest devotion of Our Lady in the United States and was a great devotion for all the people living in the New World. When we look at the history of how she came here, we see something so beautiful about her arrival. Throughout the many failed attempts to bring the faith to Florida, it was only when she arrived here that the missionaries had



success. Reading different sources, we can see that the women of the Florida Indians loved Our Lady of la Leche dearly. They saw Her as someone they could relate to, as a mother, woman, and sister. As in all families, when the mother of the family develops a love for something, it is only natural that the whole family develops a love for it as well. In this case, it was Our Blessed Mother. There are records of the Indians native to Florida praising and singing songs to Our Lady of la Leche on Saturdays in St. Augustine. Confidently we can look back and see that it was the devotion of the Indian women to Our Lady of la Leche that aided the priests in converting the native people. One may wonder if America would have been colonized if Our Lady of la Leche was not brought to the New World. Through the devotion to Our Lady, many of the native people were baptized and grew in relationship with our Blessed Mother and Jesus.

When we look at this beautiful depiction, we should admire a few points about her. First, she is wearing a magnificent crown, signifying her royalty. And yet, she is barefoot which is a sign

of humility. Next, she is gazing downward, toward her child, Jesus. In iconography, the colors give us insight as to who is depicted and what the Church believes of that person. Our Lady of la Leche is clothed with stars and dressed in red. Red is the sign of divinity, and blue is the color of humanity. This is a truly remarkable feature of this statue. It tells us that Mary is so intimate with Christ that His divinity is what makes her gown red. When we see the crown, we are reminded she is the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven. When we see her bare feet, we are reminded she is fully human, and that all is a gift from God. Her gaze attests to sitting at the feet of the master and admiring his beauty. She shows us what we are to do as seminarians and Christians: to admire Jesus with great affection and to humbly come to Him, for where the Word of God is, there is holy ground.

This image is very dear to me because it shows the beautiful family life between Our Lady and Jesus. What can we learn from Our Lady of la Leche? We learn to love one another, to understand we need each other, to appreciate and recognize what each person in our families does for us, to serve each other in love, to do little things for one another, to desire the good for the other. In a word, we learn to LOVE. Jesus was reliant on Mary when He was young. Mary was reliant on Jesus for Her salvation. Both were from the same family. Both served each other. In seminary, as in all families, there are moments of frustration and challenges. The grace-filled and joyous moments, however, always outweigh the hard moments. Our Lady of la Leche, like all depictions of the Blessed Virgin, teach us in the school of love. Christ came as “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6), and the Blessed Mother always directs us to live out Christ’s command to love.

NUESTRA SEÑORA DE LA LECHE Y BUEN PARTO, RUEGA POR NOSOTROS!



PHOTO: CARLOS LUZARDO / ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

Matthew Hines, pictured serving as thurifer above, is a seminarian for the Diocese of St. Augustine.



*“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”
(Psalm 133)*



Work & Play



WHAT LED YOU TO THE SEMINARY?

CHRISTOPHER CURRY

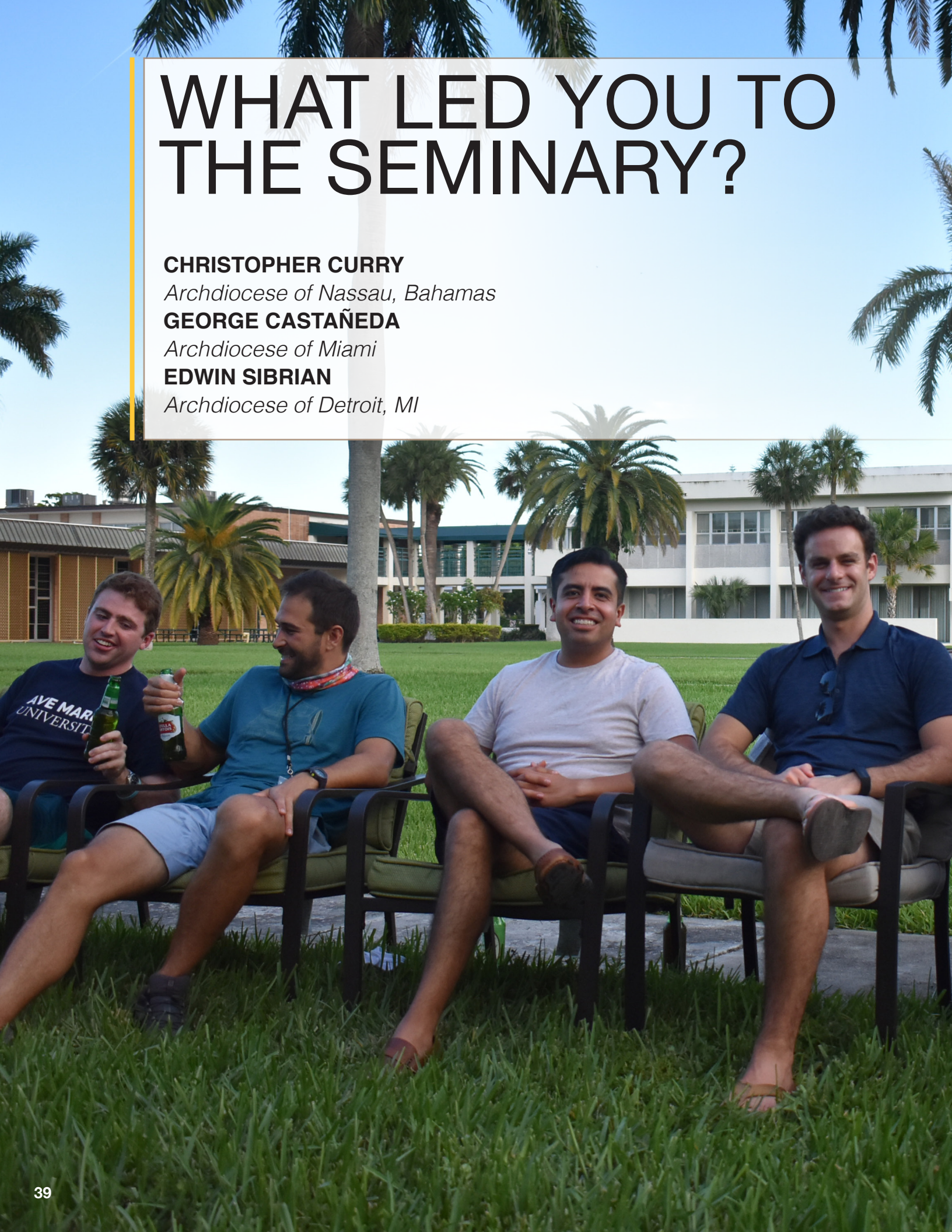
Archdiocese of Nassau, Bahamas

GEORGE CASTAÑEDA

Archdiocese of Miami

EDWIN SIBRIAN

Archdiocese of Detroit, MI



JESUS told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’” **God, have mercy on me, a sinner.** This is my daily prayer.

My story is not really unique, as I think young people, especially young men, continue to struggle with common crosses. Growing up in the Bahamas, I came from a small Catholic family. My parents always made sure we went to Mass. As a young child, I paid no mind to the regular attendance, but when those teenage years kicked in, I started to question my faith. I didn’t feel as if the questions that stirred in my mind got answered. This eventually led me to slowly leave the church and pursue the world. I can only speak on the world from my perspective, but when we look at ourselves through the lens of the world, it tells us that partying, drinking, and having fun is the only way we can find fulfillment in our lives. That was the life I lived for a long time. This lifestyle eventually caught up to me.

On my eighteenth birthday, I was drinking while driving, and got into an accident that caused my car to flip over several times. The scene was so unbelievable that one of the police officers who came to the scene said that “in his twenty-eight years of being a police officer,” he had “never seen anyone survive a car crash like you did.” I walked away from that accident without one bruise on my body. The words of that officer did not resonate with me until a few days later. Along with my parents becoming furious, I got into a huge amount of legal trouble and, afterwards, went into a state of depression. I laid in my bed and didn’t eat or talk to anyone for several days. Seeing the disappointment in my parents was especially difficult to deal with. I looked up to my parents. They were and continue to be my role models, so that accident and getting into the trouble took a big toll on me, both mentally and emotionally.

I was unsure if it was God speaking to me, or just my conscience, but I heard a voice instructing me to go to church. I had fallen away from the Church, but about a week or two after the accident, I decided to go back. As soon as I walked inside, I felt immediately at peace. That moment is still one that sticks with me and has kept me grounded in my faith. After a few weeks of going to Mass, my pastor asked me to come back to serve on the altar. I was very hesitant, but I went and felt an even deeper peace than that day when I entered the church. After that Mass, an elderly lady came up to me. I must add that she didn’t know me from a can of paint, but the words she shared with me were very moving. “You looked very peaceful on the altar, and you would make a great priest one day,” she said.

I remind myself of this line every day. This life is not easy, but it is most definitely worth it. In the end, a scripture passage that keeps me grounded in seminary is Matthew 7:13, “Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” I think we are called to look at the last five words of the passage, “only a few find it.” When entering seminary or when thinking about seminary, I think we find that path and will continue to journey on that path for the rest of our lives.



CHRISTOPHER CURRY

*Third-Year, Philosophy
Archdiocese of Nassau, Bahamas*





GEORGE CASTAÑEDA
*Second-Year, Philosophy
Archdiocese of Miami*



Coming from a Cuban family, my Catholic faith was an important part of my upbringing. I attended Catholic school my whole life in my hometown of Miami, and we always went to Mass as a family on Sundays. However, I never considered becoming a priest growing up. As a young child, I wanted to become an architect. I was always fascinated with structures and designs. I was also keenly fixed on the idea of getting married and starting a family.

The first time I felt called by God to become a priest was my freshmen year of high school. After having attended the same elementary school my entire life, moving on to the neighboring high school was a pretty big step for me. I remember being excited for this new chapter in my life but, at the same time, feeling nervous because of all the new changes. Soon after starting school, I found out that daily Mass was offered every morning in the school chapel. I felt inclined to attend Mass one morning and figured that it was a good idea to start my day in prayer.

I remember feeling tremendous peace that morning not only in the chapel, but also throughout the rest of my day. From that point on, I decided to attend Mass daily. Receiving the Eucharist every day did not only complete my day, but would eventually lead me to discern the priesthood. It was during Mass one morning, in the presence of the Eucharist, that I felt the Lord call me to be a priest.

The calling was not something I could ignore. In an effort to discern more profoundly, I decided not only to dedicate more time to personal prayer, but also to become involved with my high school's campus ministry. I figured that if I wanted to become a priest, then I should

get involved in ministry. I started by attending youth group meetings. Eventually, I was invited to become a peer minister and started leading retreats, giving talks, and organizing youth group meetings. I also got involved with the liturgy. I became a sacristan for the school chapel and altar served at large school Masses. Campus ministry became an important part not only of my high school career, but also of personal growth in my relationship with God which cultivated a deep desire for charity and for serving His people.

After graduating from high school, I chose to attend a secular university before entering seminary. I decided to study business and real estate during my time at Florida International University. I also worked for my cousin on real estate appraisal during that time. Despite all the changes in my life, I never lost sight of Christ, and I never stopped doing ministry. While I was in college, I became a faith-formation instructor and catechist at my home parish, St. Brendan, and also helped start a youth group which the parish had not had for years. After only one year, I felt the Lord call me to seminary sooner than I had planned. I was planning to take a leap of faith maybe four years or so down the road, but God needed me in seminary in His time, not mine.

I truly feel blessed by God to be called to serve in His Church. I am forever grateful to my alma mater Christopher Columbus High School for not just forming me to be a man, but for making Jesus Christ known and loved, not just to me, but also to every young man that ever roamed those halls. I look forward to serving the Lord as His priest along with some of my fellow 'Explorers' who are already hard at work serving as priests.

MI llamado al sacerdocio surgió de una forma extraordinaria. Nací en una familia católica, pero con el paso de los años, mi familia comenzó a creer en otro credo no católico. Así que, toda mi juventud la viví practicando otro credo. Soy el número 9 de once hermanos, cinco varones y seis hembras. Mi familia trabaja en la agricultura, desde los cinco años yo comencé a trabajar. Dinero nunca teníamos, pero el pan de cada día nunca nos faltó. Mi padre era una persona muy trabajadora, así que todos mis hermanos y yo sabemos cómo trabajar la agricultura muy bien. Mi madre siempre nos inculcaba a orar antes de dormir todas las noches, así que siempre he sido una persona creyente en Dios. A los 16 años me llamaba la atención entrar en un seminario para estudiar como pastor, pero al final ya no pude.

A los 17 años, yo tenía un deseo de conocer más de Dios. Y la iglesia donde íbamos está a dos horas de camino, mientras que la iglesia católica estaba a dos minutos de mi casa. Entonces, le dije a mi madre, que iría a la iglesia católica para conocer más de Dios, no fue fácil para mi familia ya que teníamos una fe muy profunda en el otro credo. Con valor fui a mi primera Misa, todo me parecía raro, ya que yo criticaba casi todo lo que hacían los católicos. En esa Misa me encontré a una tía, hermana de mi padre. Y ella se sorprendió al verme en Misa, y me dijo, "niño bienvenido a la Santa Eucaristía" mientras me daba un abrazo. Tenía mucho tiempo que nadie me daba un abrazo así, desde ese momento dije, "Wow, los católicos sí que saben amar a los extraños".

Con el paso de los meses, comencé a conocer más del credo católico y me enamoré de la forma en como enseñaban la fe. En mayo del 2013 durante una

Misa, durante mi tercera Misa, algo extraño paso en mí, un deseo de servir a Dios en el altar, y yo le dije a Dios, te puedo servir como tú quieras, pero no como católico, puesto que aún no me convertía al catolicismo. En mi mente aparecía la palabra, "sacerdote" y yo decía, "que Dios reprenda al diablo, como sacerdote no". Luego, en otra Misa sentí lo mismo al ver al sacerdote celebrando la eucaristía, yo sentía algo muy dentro de mí que me impulsaba a hablar con el sacerdote, y al terminar la eucaristía, fui y hable con él, y sin decirle que sentía que Dios me llamaba para ser sacerdote, él me dijo, "has pensado en ser sacerdote" y me quede sin palabras, y yo dije creo es una señal. Desde entonces comencé a ir a convivencias vocacionales, y me encanto, y decidí convertirme como católico, y luego hice mi primera comunión y mi confirmación. En 2014 entre al seminario, y todo fue un cambio increíble para mí y mi familia, puesto que la mayoría no estaban de acuerdo que yo entrara al seminario. Con el paso de los años mi familia comenzó a aceptar que es Dios quien me está llamando, y hoy en día, tenemos una comunicación muy buena, comparada con años atrás. El entrar al seminario, ha sido la mejor decisión que he hecho en toda mi vida, por la cual le doy gracias a Dios, y a todas las personas que hacen posible nuestro estudio de formación. Dios más que nadie conoce nuestros corazones, y si él nos ha llamado a algo grande, su amor nos mantendrá de pie hasta el final.



EDWIN SIBRIAN
*Fourth-Year, Philosophy
Diocese of Detroit, MI*



Q&A: ADORATION

Gazing at the Sun



.....
LANDON MCCOLLUM
First-Year Pre-Theology
.....

EVERY time I finish an hour of Eucharistic Adoration or “Holy Hour” as we call it in seminary, I am quite literally grinning from ear to ear. It is embarrassing to me sometimes! I feel I need to hide my smile so that I don’t look like a crazy person. But, the fact of the matter is, Our Lord is Crazy in Love with us. It is Oceans of Divine Love, and if we let Him gaze upon us for an hour, we may just experience It in a personal and profound way. “True lovers never kiss and tell,” they say, but it’s fun to ask the seminarians anyways. Sometimes with a little reluctance they will give you a peak into their interior world. I asked several seminarians, “Tell me, how do you feel after an hour of Adoration?”

Justino Marino of St. Augustine said, “I feel peace. I feel invincible, not in the sense of physical strength, but that there is nothing that I cannot overcome with the Lord. I am completely recharged. I’m at my best and ready to evangelize.”

Pierrot Lazarre of Venice said, “I feel something changes in the way I act. I feel my thinking transforms. It is contact with Heaven! In my experience it seems God talks with my soul even though I don’t understand what He says. When Adoration is over, I feel as though I have stepped into a new world. For the first ten to fifteen minutes afterwards, I need to ruminate before I enter into this new space.”

Joseph Dau of Orlando said, “It’s Wonderful! It’s wonderful because I can spend time with Jesus! I can get close to Jesus and that makes me better. When I’m there, I think about my vocation. I understand that this is my vocation, to fall in love with Jesus. I connect with Jesus. Sometimes I can be distracted in my vocation, but after a Holy Hour, it is clarity and focus. It deepens my understanding of God.”

Another simply smiled and said, “I am yours.” One said, “Peace, tranquility.” Another, “I feel Joyful.”

Heath Fulmer of Pensacola-Tallahassee said, “I feel known, loved, and free, and I know that our Father in Heaven loves me and there is nothing more life-giving than that.”

Kyle DePalma of St Augustine said, “I find my true Identity in Christ as an unconditionally beloved son of the Father.”



We find a bouquet of different experiences here in these beautiful responses all pointing to a profound mystery. They experience the same reality, yet in perfectly personal and unique ways. Such is the sublime way of God. God hones in on each person, as if he were the only one in the universe. These men have offered themselves to be priests of God one day, and it seems that in Holy Hour, Jesus tinkers with them and shapes their hearts according to His perfect

designs. He repairs, converts, comforts, strengthens, and even spoils them rotten from time to time. O God, You are such a Romeo, if we only knew. And yet we forget so quickly again when we are swept into the current of responsibilities, circumstances and relationships. How I wish we could easily find His presence in these places too. Then it would be true Heaven on Earth.

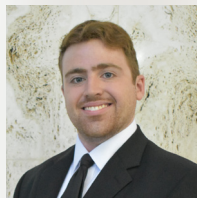


SEMINARIANS

FIRST-YEAR PHILOSOPHY



Isaac Cruz
Diocese of St. Petersburg



George Gilbert
Diocese of St. Augustine



Antonio Gomes
Diocese of Orlando



Benjamin Harris
Diocese of St. Petersburg



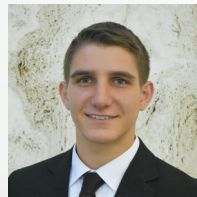
Andrew Lands
Diocese of St. Augustine



Luca Lopez
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



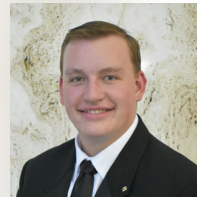
Emmanuel Magallenes
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



Caleb Malec
Diocese of St. Petersburg



Mauricio Moreno
*Diocese of Charleston,
South Carolina*



Blake Schuman
*Diocese of Charleston,
South Carolina*



Vu Huy
Diocese of Orlando

SECOND-YEAR PHILOSOPHY



Gabriel Campos
Archdiocese of Miami



George Castañeda
Archdiocese of Miami



James Gates
Diocese of Venice



Enerson Hernandez
*Diocese of Charleston,
South Carolina*



Jared Jackson
*Diocese of Charleston,
South Carolina*



Didier Montoya
*Archdiocese of Atlanta,
Georgia*



Nathanael Nieves
Diocese of Venice

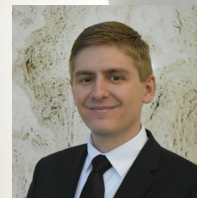


Lazaro Rosendo
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*

THIRD-YEAR PHILOSOPHY



Paul Ciulei
Diocese of St. Petersburg



William Contreras
*Diocese of Las Cruces,
New Mexico*



José Cortez
Diocese of St. Augustine



Christopher Curry
*Archdiocese of Nassau,
Bahamas*



Spencer Grant
Diocese of St. Petersburg



Adrian Herrera
Archdiocese of Miami



Matthew Hines
Diocese of St. Augustine



Andrew Zsebedics
Diocese of St. Petersburg

FOURTH-YEAR PHILOSOPHY



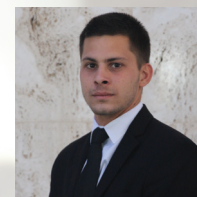
Mario Aguilar
*Diocese of Charleston,
South Carolina*



Fritz Anacreon
Archdiocese of Miami



Rickinson Bantou
Archdiocese of Miami



Samuele D'Angelo
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



Jacob Daul
Diocese of St. Augustine



Esteban Merkt
Diocese of St. Augustine



Saint-Clos Papouloute
Archdiocese of Miami



Jeremiah Pedraza
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



Bernardo Pimentel
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



Leo Rene
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



Filippo Schiavo
Diocese of St. Augustine



Edwin Sibrian
*Archdiocese of Detroit,
Michigan*



William Strassberger
Diocese of St. Augustine



Matthew Taisipic
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*

SEMINARIANS

FIRST-YEAR PRE-THEOLOGY



Joseph Binh Dau
Diocese of Orlando



Kyle DePalma
Diocese of St. Augustine



Heath Fulmer
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee



Matthias Laywell
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee



Landon McCollum
Diocese of St. Augustine



Justino Moreno
Diocese of St. Augustine



Juan Osorio
Archdiocese of Miami



Stephen Parker
Diocese of St. Augustine



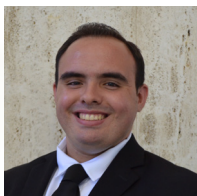
Christopher Stewart
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee



Timothy Tylac
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee



Raphael Lopez-Valencia
*Neocatechumenal Way/
Archdiocese of Miami*



Erich Vazquez
Archdiocese of Miami

SECOND-YEAR PRE-THEOLOGY



Kenneth Laybourn
Diocese of St. Augustine



Pierrot Lazarre
Diocese of Venice



Aristedes Lima
Archdiocese of Miami



Carlos Luzado
Archdiocese of Miami



Brice Reinman
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee



Gabriel Seiglie
Archdiocese of Miami

Are you being called?

Reach out for more information



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VOCATION DIRECTOR Rev. Matthew Grey
EMAIL vicar@charleston vocations.com
PHONE 843-261-0532



> **COMPLINE.** The seminary community gathers in St. Raphael's chapel to pray compline (night prayer) accompanied by Eucharistic Benediction to conclude the day. Sometimes, a typical Miami thunderstorm accompanies our voices in praise to God.

NEW TO THE COMMUNITY



Dr. Paola Bernardini
Academic Dean

"After many years of work in catholic education, I feel blessed to be able to use my experience for the good of the seminarians, faculty, and local community. The job of academic dean has been like a calling for me. It fills my days with many meaning even when it is demanding."



Dr. Ryan J. Brady, Ph.D.
Lecturer in Theology



Rev. Victor Cortes, Ph.D.
Lecturer in Philosophy



Dr. Pablo Martinez Diente
Seminary Registrar



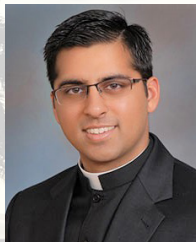
Rev. Dustin Feddon, Ph.D.
Lecturer in Philosophy



Dcn. Edgar Kelly
Director of HR/
Business Office



Marisela Kelly
Librarian



Rev. Daniel Martin,
Ph.L., Ph.D.Cand.
Lecturer in Philosophy



Rev. Joseph Rogers,
M.T.S., S.T.L.
Lecturer in Theology



Dr. Joseph W. Yarbrough
Lecturer in Philosophy



Rev. Konrad Zaborowski,
SDS, Ph.D.
Lecturer in Philosophy



(Left to Right) Chef Manuel Olavez, Aysel Lorenzo, Rosa Guerra, Flor Ruiz, Juan Carlos Santos

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Faculty

Fr. Ferdinand Santos, Ph.D.
Catholic University of Louvain

Dr. Paola Bernardini
Harvard University

Dr. Ryan Brady
Ave Maria University

Fr. Victor Cortes, Ph.D.
Pontifical University Santa Croce

Dr. Joseph Yarbrough
Cornell University
Oxford University

Fr. Konrad Zaborowski, SDS, Ph.D.
Catholic University of Lublin

Fr. Dustin Feddon, Ph.D.
Florida State University

Dr. Josh Madden
Ave Maria University

Dr. Maria Teresa Morgan
Barry University

Dr. John O'Neill
Ave Maria University

Dr. Ramon Santos
University of Miami

Fr. Dylan Schrader, Ph.D.
Catholic University of America

Fr. David Vidal, Ph.D.
Catholic University of America

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SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

DIDIER MONTOYA

Second-Year Philosophy
Archdiocese of Atlanta, Georgia



PARA mí una de las frases que más ha impactado mi historia vocacional es el lema del Papa Francisco “Mirándolo con Misericordia, lo escogió”. Este lema ha sido muy crucial dentro de mi historia vocacional porque, en cierto modo, me hace recordar que Él me ha llamado a pesar de mis culpas y de mis debilidades. Una pregunta dentro de esta pequeña reflexión es: ¿qué es lo que sentí cuando me llamó el Señor? Fue como un pequeño susurro que se siente en el corazón y que me decía en cierto modo un “quiero que seas totalmente mío”.

¿Por qué Sacerdote?

En mi país natal (Colombia), yo solía ir a la celebración de la Eucaristía todos los días. Durante ciertos años, dentro de mí, había un sentimiento que me hacía percibir que no era tan generoso como debía ser con el Señor; a causa de esto, empecé a ir al Santísimo Sacramento del altar sin falta a las 3 P.M para rezar la Coronilla a la Divina Misericordia, y como es usual para un joven en su último año de escuela, le pregunté al Señor cuál era su Voluntad para mí. Sin embargo, un sentimiento de Gracia surgió durante ese momento que parecía llenar mi corazón. Tal sentimiento era sobre la vida al sacerdocio, estaba totalmente impregnado en mi mente y en mi corazón. Por tal motivo, empecé a evitar pensar sobre la vida sacerdotal por un corto tiempo ¿por qué? Porque yo quería ser periodista o quizá un profesor, pero, no un sacerdote (ellos no tienen a nadie que los ame) era mi vago pensamiento, sin saber que ya había alguien que me amaba más que nadie. A pesar de ello, esa voz que me decía “quiero que seas totalmente mío” resonaba en mi cabeza y de un modo u otro me hacía sentir en paz.

¿Por qué Atlanta?

Antes de llegar a los Estados Unidos realicé un proceso de discernimiento de 4 años; posteriormente, empecé a trabajar en DIRECTV – Latinoamérica como asesor de servicio al cliente y luego como entrenador de producto. Aquí es donde se pone interesante, porque, un primero de noviembre recibí la llamada de uno de mis mejores amigos que es seminarista, y me hizo esta tajante pregunta: ¿todavía quieres ser sacerdote? A lo que respondí que sí, pero que aún necesitaba más tiempo. Por este motivo, él me sugirió presentar mi aplicación a la Arquidiócesis de Atlanta, pues, un obispo colombiano (Mons. Zarama) estaba allí y había un proceso para seminaristas colombianos.

Para ser honesto, estaba muy asustado y con muchos temores, ya que, Estados Unidos es un país lejos de mi hogar, de mi familia y de mis amigos, y no hablar sobre



el idioma o la cultura; algunos cambios son difíciles de asimilar... A pesar de eso, el Señor me otorgó un coraje que sé que solo podría venir de Él, y así envié mi aplicación. Después de siete meses, fui admitido para empezar mi proceso, acontecimiento que causó lágrimas, abrazos, risas, y muchas más emociones. También, en frente de Jesús, le pedía que me diera fuerza, porque, sabía que esta vocación me superaba demasiado; a esta petición leí esta frase del Evangelio que dice “Todo aquél que deje todo por mí, heredará la Vida Eterna” Mt, 19,29. A causa de estos sucesos, solo me quedaba confiar en su Amor y su Misericordia.

Así pues, salí de mi país, de mi cultura y de mi tierra. Algo que nunca voy a olvidar mientras tenga memoria es el abrazo que le di a mi madre en el aeropuerto, pues, era como un abrazo lleno de felicidad, pero, al mismo tiempo de tristeza. Como es normal en mí, estaba nervioso y nostálgico, estaba dejando de ver el cielo del país en el que crecí para embarcarme en una de las mejores aventuras de mi vida, la aventura de Cristo. Todavía puedo recordar la belleza del cielo y del mar, contemplar la belleza de la creación era un signo de Dios en mi viaje a los Estados Unidos, ¡cuánto amor sentí en ese momento! Solo pensaba en el llamado de Cristo quien me había llamado con llamamiento Santo.

A fin de cuentas, llegué el 18 de agosto a Saint John Vianney College Seminary en Miami. No entendía mucho de lo que me decían, especialmente en la Eucaristía, por tal motivo, cerré mis ojos en el momento de la homilía y lo único que le entendí al padre “Ferdí”, como lo llamamos, fue: “Jesús te trajo hasta aquí, no importa bajo que hechos o circunstancias, Él te trajo hasta aquí por una razón específica” De nuevo, como en aquél momento que me sentí llamado, llegaron sentimientos de paz a mi interior y pude entender que el hecho de estar aquí fue su obra y nada más que su obra. En mi seminario, me siento como con mi segunda familia, con un director espiritual que es como

un padre, un amigo y también, la estrella polar de mi vocación sacerdotal, también, con un rector y vicerrector que me han cuidado y procurado que cada día crezca, especialmente, el padre Matías quien es mi consejero académico. Adicionalmente, con un grupo de amigos a quienes amo y quiero, esperando que sean los mejores sacerdotes que puedan ser.

Finalmente, los santos que me han impactado más son: San Felipe Neri, Santa Teresa de Lisieux, San Juan Pablo II, y Santa Laura Montoya.



Cuaresma en Cuarentena



ARI LIMA
*Second-Year Pre-Theology
Archdiocese of Miami*

Estamos en un tiempo muy interesante que ha causado que todo el mundo cambiara en unos meses. El coronavirus ha afectado a casi todos los países, especialmente los Estados Unidos. Pero, gracias a Dios, yo he estado en el seminario durante todo este tiempo. Para ser honesto, es un regalo estar aquí en nuestra comunidad. Aunque, todavía estamos en formación, tomando clases, recibiendo los sacramentos, asistiendo a la misa diaria, y viviendo con nuestros queridos hermanos y formadores mientras el mundo ha parado en su trabajo, sus vacaciones, sus planes, y el ruido típico. Este es un tiempo difícil para el mundo; es un tiempo de miedo e inseguridad, pero también es un tiempo bueno para buscar algo más profundo en nuestra realidad.

Un día quiero servir en este mundo que tiene tanto miedo ahora. Pero, para hacer esto hay que aprender como

vivieron los apóstoles y discípulos en el camino del Señor. Para mí, esta situación se ha convertido en un momento de pensar en mi vocación y relación con Dios. Puesto que, mucha gente ha muerto a causa del virus en el mundo y, lamentablemente muchos de ellos, jóvenes. Por eso, nosotros debemos de tomar medidas sanitarias de cuidado personal. Esta realidad tan humana nos conlleva a preguntarnos a nosotros mismos: Si Dios me lleva mañana, ¿estaré listo para morir? Por ejemplo, en las clases de filosofía, abordamos el tema del existencialismo auténtico, tema que reclama que el ser humano se siente más auténtico cuando sabe que la muerte es una posibilidad real en su existir. Con esta perspectiva, es más fácil dejar las cosas que no son muy importantes y agarrar las cosas más importantes, como lo es mi relación con Dios. Entonces, Dios es amor y deseo vivir y morir con ese gran amor. Si yo hago esto, no hay motivo para preocuparme por la muerte. Por esta razón, puedo decir que no hay nada que nos impida confiar en la gran misericordia de Dios.

A veces tenía ganas de ir y estar con mi familia y mis amigos, pero, no podía salir durante la cuarentena aquí en el Seminario. Por eso, me resultó interesante notar que las palabras 'Cuaresma' y 'cuarentena' son similares, y por eso, puedo compararlas con los 40 días que pasó nuestro Señor Jesucristo en el desierto ayunando y orando. Es importante recordar que desde el año 1970 aquí en el seminario no se celebraba la Semana Santa, porque todos nos íbamos a prestar servicio pastoral a nuestras Parroquias. Por eso, es una bendición que luego de tantos años, sea la primera vez que hayamos pasado aquí la Cuaresma entera, y que hubiéramos celebrado La Pascua en el seminario. Recuerdo que La Misa de Pascua fue la celebración litúrgica más hermosa en la que haya participado en mi vida. Debido a que, la belleza de esta liturgia fue algo místico y profundo. Por ejemplo, yo pude contemplar la historia de salvación, el honor de ser sacerdote, y el misterio de la Eucaristía que mucha gente no pudo recibir durante este tiempo. También, contemplé el llamado de Dios, ya que, me pareció más claro en esos días. Aunque yo recibo los sacramentos frecuentemente en el seminario, tengo que apreciar más el honor y regalo que tengo hoy en día. Gracias a Dios por los regalos, y también, por las dificultades que me ayudan a crecer en la fe, la esperanza, y el amor.

SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

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NACÍ y crecí toda mi vida en Venezuela. Para mí venir a Miami era realmente un sueño, incluso muchas veces lo podía ver inalcanzable. Hoy miro en retrospectiva todos los grandes pasos y sacrificios vividos para estar aquí y comprendo que todo comienza cuando me sentía más vulnerable, creo que en ese momento fue cuando mi corazón gritó más fuerte y reconocí que todo lo que anhelaba no lo iba a encontrar en nadie más que en Dios, así un día logré entender que todo el acontecimiento fue un “Sí” de amor, un sí que me invitaba a dar un salto mayor a mis propios deseos, lo que luego de mucha oración y continuo discernimiento, el apoyo de mi familia, mis mejores amigos, mi

comunidad, generó ese sueño para unirlos a la voluntad de Dios.

Llegué hace 4 años a Miami, muchos sueños profesionales y personales, sin embargo, no tenía muchas cosas claras. Ya había terminado mis estudios universitarios, tenía experiencia laboral y una vida bastante desordenada que no me llenaba ni me daba un sentido claro, estaba en la “búsqueda de la felicidad”; la cual hoy entiendo que solo es posible cuando asumimos el significado de amar.

Nunca había pensado en el sacerdocio o incluso en seguir la voluntad de Dios; mis proyectos se centraron en obtener una carrera universitaria, así que me gradué con un título en Administración y Marketing. También me enfoqué en buscar un buen trabajo para lograr mi estabilidad económica y así casarme (Sí tuve mi novia también). Mi familia es muy católica, desde pequeño asistía a misa, estudié en un colegio católico de una congregación religiosa y para mí la fe estaba muy presente, aunque yo no le encontraba sentido.

Una vez que llegué a este país me sentía muy solo, lo que me llevó a hacer el retiro de Emaús en Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, necesitaba un nuevo comienzo, un poco de silencio de todo lo que no me hacía feliz para conocer mejor mi corazón. Comencé a servir en mi parroquia, a involucrarme más, a profundizar en mi fe. Sentía que tenía una nueva misión, había vivido una experiencia que cambió mi forma de pensar, estaba esforzándome por ser la mejor versión de mí mismo. El grupo de jóvenes ETM fue un gran pilar para mí, el poder vivir tan de cerca la evangelización, el servicio y la oración le fueron aportando a mi vida un nuevo sentido, algo que antes no había experimentado y que me invitaban a un reto mayor cada día; poder ser ejemplo para tantos jóvenes que tenían las mismas necesidades que yo.

Mientras todo esto pasaba en mi vida, mi papá enfermó gravemente, fue diagnosticado con cáncer en su cerebro, un glioblastoma en su etapa 4. Fue un verdadero golpe para mí, un cambio rápido de planes; mi papá llegó de urgencia para comenzar un tratamiento y buscar una salida a su enfermedad. Luego de dos meses de viajes, decisiones difíciles y la entrega a Dios de su vida, mi familia debió irse del país para poder sostener un largo procedimiento. Después de este episodio muchas preguntas comienzan a llegar, había dejado todo por irme con mi familia, ahora estaba de vuelta y listo para comenzar de nuevo, no podía dejar de agradecer por el milagro de la salud de mi papá, su cáncer estaba disminuyendo y sentía un gran deseo de dar gracias constantemente. La vida había cambiado y toda esta experiencia me había acerca-



do mucho a refugiarme en el Señor. Y aunque hoy mi papa no está, me dio el mayor apoyo de todos.

No fue nada más extraordinario que la oración y mi propia reflexión donde me fui dando cuenta de que quizás el sacerdocio era mi camino, llegó con un pensamiento que no se iba de mi mente. Sin embargo, había muchas dudas y miedos: ¿Es bueno para mí?, ¿y mi vida, estudios y planes?, ¿es posible?, ¿puedo ser yo capaz de entregarme así? Pero hoy comprendo que solo quien se siente llamado por Él es capaz de superar todo y vivirlo con amor y alegría. Y aunque el proceso de formación tiene sus retos humanos, entendí que si quería descubrir que era lo mejor para mí debía lanzarme y olvidarme de mis inseguridades. Solo quien está seguro de no quebrarse cuando el mundo se muestra demasiado ciego para lo que Él nos ofrece, solo quien frente a todo es capaz de responder con un “sí”, solo un hombre de esta forma puede ser capaz de escuchar lo que Él tiene para nosotros, porque en ese momento entendí que la verdad del mundo no es para mí, sino para entregársela a los demás.



> **CURÉ D'ARS.** St. John Vianney is the patron saint of parish priests and the namesake of the seminary. During his life, St. John Vianney devoted his entire life to his pastoral work resulting in the radical spiritual conversion of Ars, France and its surrounding regions. In the chapel, the example of St. John Vianney shows seminarians what is primary in one's pursuit of the priesthood: complete attentiveness to Christ. As seminarians navigate the various stages of formation, the vision of St. John Vianney serves as a reminder of the attentive simplicity that God will use to convert the hearts of the world.



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