

THE DISCIPLE

A SEMI-ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE SEMINIANS OF
SAINT JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY, MIAMI

FAITH. FORMATION. FATHERHOOD.



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





> ATTENTIVE TO CHRIST.

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The same truth holds, if not more so, to the life of a seminarian. Each day, we get to sit at the feet of Our Lord present in the Eucharist. This enables us to allow Christ to inform our day, our vocation, and our entire lives. Like the Apostles, the more time we spend with Our Lord, the more we are transformed in Him and into His Body, so that, one day, we may be one in act and in person.

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A SEMI-ANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE SEMINARIANS OF SAINT JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY, MIAMI

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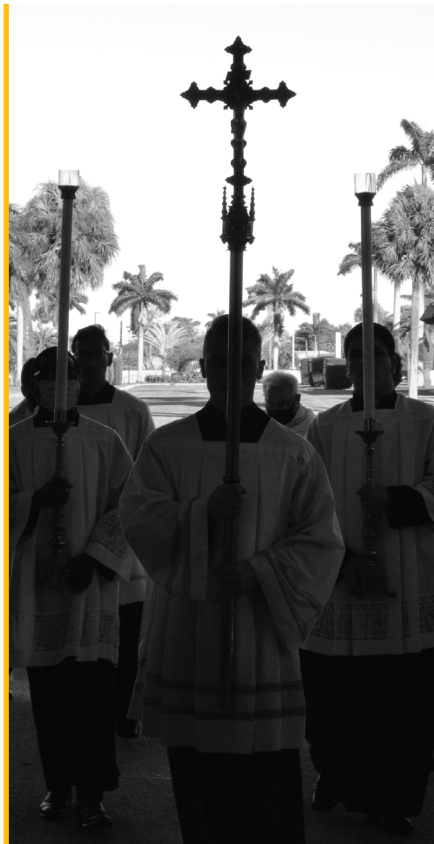
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FRONT COVER. ANDREW ZSEBEDICS (*Philosophy III, Diocese of St. Petersburg*) pictured leading the community in procession on the Feast of St. Joseph during the Year of St. Joseph declared by Pope Francis. The procession featured a float constructed by William Strassberger and Stephen Parker.

PHOTO: CALEB MALEC/ ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

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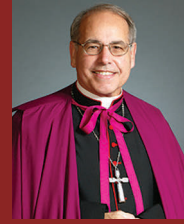
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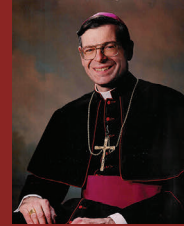
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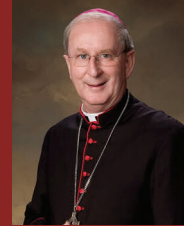
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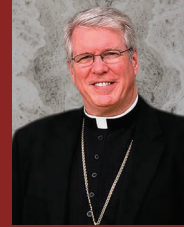
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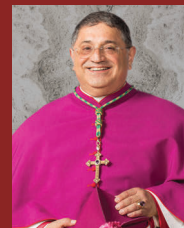
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BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESES OF FLORIDA



FROM THE RECTOR

A Year of Walking with the Lord

“IT’S HEAVEN ALL THE WAY TO HEAVEN, because Jesus is the way,” St. Catherine of Sienna once said. With Christ by one’s side, “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation” can shake one’s confidence that, in the end, “all will be well.”

At no other time in my tenure as rector of St. John Vianney, did such sentiments feel and prove to be more true than this past year of formation. To say that it was a tough year wouldn’t do justice to the enormity of the effort and energy we all expended in facing the challenges we encountered as a family that sought to continue praying, studying, building community, doing apostolic work and managing the operations of a seminary amidst a global pandemic and a third time living in a “bubble.”

It was a tough year, but we succeeded. With Christ by our side, we succeeded. Not one seminarian, not one priest-formator, not one lay professor or staff member fell ill while studying, praying, doing ministry, or working at Saint John Vianney. Not one. Considering the limitations of our space, the fact that we share a lot of common areas, and the age of the college seminarians we form, that feat was nothing short of a miracle.

[We did mourn the loss of our beloved Deacon Carlos Garcia who passed away towards the end of the Christmas break; it was a heavy blow to all of us given that he was part of the team that kept everyone safe while the seminary was in session. This edition of *The Disciple* is dedicated to his memory.]

“It’s heaven all the way to heaven, because Jesus is the way.” The year may have been tough, but it was nothing short of amazing. While covid continued to rage outside, within the seminary’s “bubble,” we offered our every activity – from our first waking moment to the last prayer we said before retiring –

not only to ask the Lord for an end to the pandemic and to pray for all those who continued to suffer, but to bless our efforts and endeavors this year. And as always, he came through for us.

Prayer, study, fraternity, and community life gained new levels of depth this year. What initially felt like “weight,” eventually – and with trust in God’s grace – transformed into genuine “depth.” The seminarians grew in authentic kindness, care, concern and solicitude towards one another. It was, in fact, this mindfulness for everyone’s safety that kept all of us protected within the seminary’s “bubble.” The men genuinely did their best to protect one another. And they succeeded! With Christ by their side, they succeeded.

They developed a healthy critical attitude towards developments relating to the pandemic that was, at the same time, open-minded and aware of the complexity of the situation everyone faced. The safety protocols we put in place since our first “lockdown” in March 13, 2020 were some of the strictest one could find in any seminary, college, or university. And while it took some time for all of us to adjust to them, the men soldiered on, growing in the process. In the end, it wasn’t the strict safety protocols that kept them all safe. It was rather, the patience, perseverance, and growth in maturity in the face of a great challenge that did. This wasn’t merely our doing; it was the Lord’s.

Most importantly though, it was the gradual but certain growth in wisdom and understanding that was perhaps the most amazing thing we, as a community, witnessed this year in the young men we were forming. This didn’t come easy, nor was it without its fits and starts, bumps along the way, forks along the road and, on a few occasions, even seeming dead-ends.

“Wisdom” is *sapentia* in Latin. The word *sapere* means to “taste.” A philosopher once said that “there

is no path to wisdom except by tasting the sorrows and pains of life.” The difficulties of conducting the operations of a seminary and getting seminarians to stick to being seriously engaged in formation during such an unbelievably challenging year have “stretched” all of us to our limits and given the men a definite “taste” of those sorrows and pains.

Life wasn't easy on lockdown. But it has certainly stretched their capacity to find the greatest of joys in the smallest of victories; it taught them resilience. There's no doubt they will emerge from this experience tougher, stronger, wiser. If, God-willing, they become priests, the People of God will find no better shepherds willing to lay down their lives for their flock; and they will know how to do it. The Lord showed them the way.

But for the institution too, there were tremendous joys amidst the difficulties. St. John Vianney became a full-fledged graduate school this year, offering accredited B.A. and M.A. degrees – both on-site and on-line, in Philosophy and Theology. The first batch of students in the Pre-Theology Program completed their Master's Degree in Philosophy. The first thesis defenses proved to be amazing experiences for

everyone. The seminary is in the process of getting accredited as a language school, which will allow us to better serve dioceses across the country who need assistance with their seminarians or priests who need to learn either Spanish or English. A new roof was installed in the seminary chapel, areas around campus that needed repair and renovation were attended to despite the challenge of the lockdown, the seminary now has an amazing line up of professors with doctorates in Philosophy and Theology and, before ending the year, seminarians were vaccinated, giving all of us a couple of weeks of “freedom” from the “bubble” before everyone leaves for the summer months. None of these was simply our doing; they were the Lord's.

“It's heaven all the way to heaven, because Jesus is the way.” St. Catherine of Sienna was right. And this year, perhaps the most difficult in the 60-year history of St. John Vianney College Seminary, turned out to be precisely that: “heaven.” It may not look like such for an outside observer, but for us who have, this pandemic year, chosen to believe, to see things with the eyes of faith, and who have walked with the Lord every step of the way, how could it be anything but that?

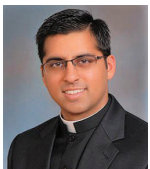
Very Reverend Ferdinand R.S. Santos, Ph.D.
Rector-President





St. Joseph: Intercessor in Uncertain Times

The Childhood of Christ, by Gerard van Honthorst (1592–1656). Public Domain



FR. DANIEL MARTIN

*Professor of Philosophy,
Spiritual Director*

In these uncertain times, when we hope to navigate the pandemic and look forward to normal seminary and parish life, we would do well to ask for the intercession of St. Joseph who teaches us how to be priests in the midst of the uncertainty and ambiguity that characterize our contemporary world. Joseph is a striking example of fidelity and willingness to live in mystery. Even when he did not have a clear-cut answer to the challenges before him, Joseph placed

his trust in the heavenly Father in order to be a saintly father himself. We priests and seminarians ought to do the same.

There is no simple instruction manual for being a father. Most men struggle to figure it out even when they do have excellent models of manhood in their life. In our times, when so many lack good role models, more than a few young fathers wish they had someone to show them the ropes. Young priests and seminarians too can easily feel overwhelmed by the challenges presented to them by their parishioners who look to “Father” for an answer to the deep questions of the human heart. Yet, when it comes to so many of the challenging issues and



known for developing the polio vaccine. Whereas scientists before him had used a live but weak virus to develop their vaccines, Salk utilized a non-infectious killed virus instead. Yet before the vaccine could save countless lives, Salk, not knowing exactly whether it would work or not, had to test it on human subjects (animal testing had already been completed). In his kitchen, he injected himself, his wife, and his three sons. Before asking other families to take the risk, he risked his own life and the lives of those most precious to him. Soon others, 1.8 million of them, volunteered for testing as well, and, thanks to their joint efforts and sacrifices, the polio vaccine was quickly declared safe and effective. When they asked him who owned the patent, Salk said, not Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson and Johnson, but “the people.” He asked the interviewer, “Could you patent the sun?” The most feared disease of the 20th century was brought down by a father who cared, who didn’t ask for a dime, and who wouldn’t ask others to take on a risk that he himself wasn’t willing to accept for himself and for his own family.

Everyone, religious or not, can recognize the contribution of Jonas Salk, especially as we face the ravages of COVID-19 in our own day. Yet few, only those with the eyes and ears of faith, can see, in the example of silent St. Joseph, a father who gave us an even greater remedy, Jesus Christ, for the even deadlier diseases of sin and death itself. Joseph is a father who took on an even greater risk with far less clarity and chance of success. A few of his fellow scientists might have told Salk his method wouldn’t work, but I’m sure there were far more detractors and naysayers in Nazareth who told Joseph to divorce Mary and run in the opposite direction. While Salk had the support of government and higher education (President Franklin D. Roosevelt had polio and set up a national foundation which provided funding for Salk’s vaccine trials), Joseph was chased out of his country by Herod’s slaughter of the innocents and had to flee to Egypt, the place of slavery. Salk was able to see the triumph of his vaccine and the virtual elimination of the polio virus, but Joseph died before he could really see the fruits of his labors, before the public ministry and resurrection of Jesus. Needless to say, two thousand years later, sin is still very much with us, and we still struggle to accept the ever-available cure.

situations before us, there simply isn’t an easy or comfortable answer. Often doing the right thing means tremendous personal sacrifice and trust that God will see us through. It means being ok with not knowing if your plans and goals will succeed or not.

Before turning our attention to St. Joseph, we might look to another Jewish father who lived in challenging times similar to ours and who also changed the world for the better. Born to an Orthodox Polish-Jewish immigrant family, Jonas Salk, the 20th century American scientist, is best

The priestly fathers of the future will have to take risks, make plans in the midst of uncertainty, and confront the ambiguities of the 21st century. They will not be given an instruction manual and yet will have to trust in God to answer the new questions that will be posed to them, questions that even the best seminary preparation cannot resolve beforehand. They will have to learn how to undergo trials not of vaccines but of the human heart. They will take pains to offer Jesus, a cure that many will reject, a vaccine the world has yet to approve. In all this, St. Joseph is for us a most excellent role model and powerful intercessor, a man who embodied fatherhood in the most uncertain of times.

Father in the Shadows

ANDREW ZSEBEDICS

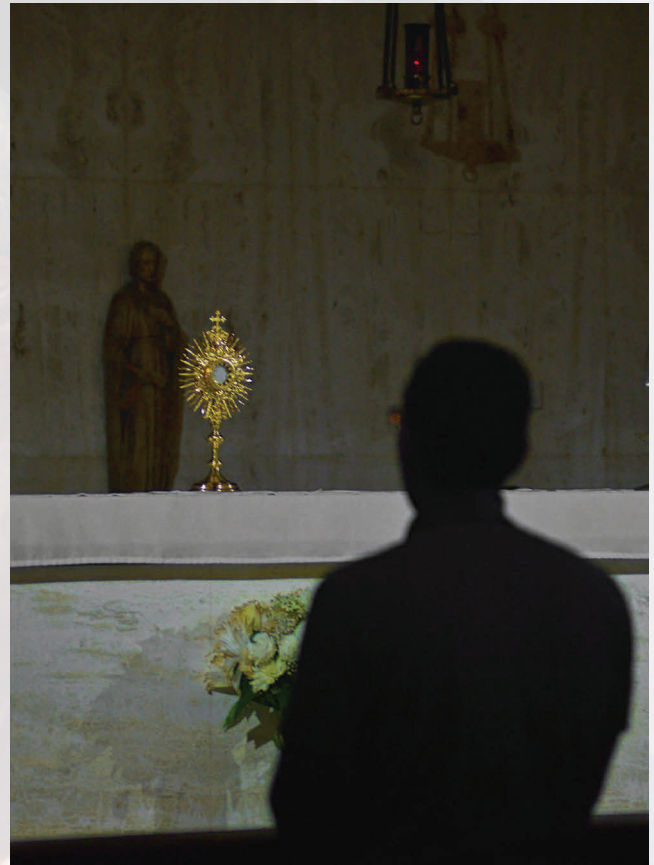
*Third-Year Philosophy
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Facing the altar, at most parishes at least, are two statues: on the left side is Mary, and on the right side is St. Joseph. As a kid growing up, I always wanted to sit on Mary's side. I always avoided St. Joseph's side because I thought Mary was cooler, as she had many different titles such as Mary, Queen of the Universe, the Mother of God, and the Mother of Our Lord. On the other hand, my younger self always thought St. Joseph was pretty lame because he is portrayed as old, quiet, and just some man in the background of the story of salvation.

It wasn't until this past year where my views of St. Joseph totally changed. It all started at the beginning of this year, the time we traditionally get assigned new pews to sit in for the new semester. I was assigned, ironically, to the pew on Mary's side. You can imagine how much I enjoyed my seat throughout the semester, but it wasn't until later into the semester where I noticed something particularly interesting. One of the mornings, when Jesus was normally exposed in the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel, I was kneeling in my pew when my line of vision locked on to what was behind the monstrance. The Eucharist lined up perfectly in front of the St. Joseph statue; to be exact, right where his heart would be. This became a source of reflection for me in my mornings, and I kept asking the Lord, "What's so special about St. Joseph?" in my prayer. For a large part of that semester, I was really drawn to think more about St. Joseph; however, I didn't know how or where to begin to learn more about him.

As I went home for our winter break, it was a beautiful surprise to hear that our Holy Father, Pope Francis, announced that it would be a Year of St. Joseph in celebration of the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pope Pius IX's declaration of St. Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church. With that announcement, I was totally in awe and affirmed that the Holy Spirit wanted me to learn more about St. Joseph. So, I started reading *Patris Corde*, Pope Francis' Apostolic Letter, which is translated as *With a Father's Heart*. From reading that letter, my whole view of St. Joseph changed immediately. St. Joseph's fatherhood was described in seven different ways by Pope Francis: a beloved father, a tender and loving father, an obedient father, an accepting father, a creatively courageous father, a working father, and a father in the shadows. After reading and praying with each description of St. Joseph, my heart kept being drawn to the last one - a father in the shadows.

Reflecting on my own life, I realize how I saw St. Joseph in my own earthly father. When I was growing up, my father was building a house for us, and I always noticed from time to time how a new wound would appear on his arms or legs. My dad was pretty good at not talking about them,



and it wasn't until later that I realized it was due to his work. My dad would never complain about the amount of pain or discomfort he was going through. He worked and worked, never complained, and always had time for my siblings and myself. Perhaps why I am drawn to this title of St. Joseph as a father in the shadows is because much of what St. Joseph, my dad, and many other fathers do are done in the shadows, are done without asking for recognition, and are done out of love. Earthly fatherhood is much more than just bringing a child into the world. "Fathers are not born, but made," says Pope Francis. St. Joseph may not have been a father to Jesus through mere blood, however, God, the King of the Universe, decided and trusted St. Joseph as the father for Jesus. Wow. To think God would entrust a man to take care of his Son and that God would make Himself subject in that way to the fatherhood of St. Joseph blows my mind. What does this mean for you and me?

FATHER IN THE SHADOWS

St. Joseph has been in the shadows for a long time now, but now, more than ever, it is time for us to look into the shadows. What better example, of how to be a good man and how to be good father, is there for us to look at than the father of Jesus who taught Jesus what it means to be a man and a father, despite St. Joseph's limitations as a man. St. Joseph, who did not become a father by blood, became a father when he gave his "yes" to God to take care of Jesus not just one time, but daily.

Two virtues which stick out to me in the fatherhood of St. Joseph are humility and obedience. St. Joseph was a man of great humility, one who recognized that all that he was, was because of God's grace. He was also a man of great obedience as he responded immediately to the Lord calling him. What is fascinating to me is how these two virtues are different in their own ways yet common in their foundation, and that foundation is love. Ultimately, it is love that we are called to, for God is love and in fact He is more than love itself. From here,

St. Joseph reminds me that my time here in seminary is to do one thing only – to fall in love with God. We are called for holiness, to be great saints, which is our primary vocation. Being a priest, religious, or husband is secondary to this primary vocation for holiness. St. Joseph was a good man before being a good father, for you cannot have the latter without the former. Formation here at St. John Vianney College Seminary focuses on the former, which focuses on becoming the man Christ wants us to become.

This year, God has revealed to me another part of His own heart through a good man and a good father - St. Joseph. I hope you too may look to St. Joseph to see how the Lord is calling you deeper into love with Him and how we can be great saints one day. Be assured of my prayers for you all and maybe, from time to time, sit on St. Joseph's side of the church when you go to Mass and ask for his intercession to help you become the saint you are being called to be.







St Joseph: Our Role Model and Mentor

Bishop Felipe J. Estévez

Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine

The receptivity of the people of God to the Year of St Joseph has truly surprised me. Even if St. Mark, St. John, and St. Paul merely mentioned him, his importance in the beginnings of the mystery of salvation, his unique witness as chaste spouse of the most blessed Virgin Mary and mentor and tutor of Jesus, and as head of the Holy Family of Nazareth has become better understood and thus, more appreciated. Somehow in this terrible world pandemic St. Joseph is seen as a beacon of light.

This brief article seeks to explore how St Joseph can be a mentor for us priests and seminarians. His story resembles our journey in more ways than one. Joseph was an ordinary man who fell in love with young Mary and hoped to marry her and have children. And the mystery broke through. God's plans often are not our own and Joseph had to struggle, pray and purify his intentions and listen to the Word of the unnamed Angel: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home" (Mt 1:20). The implications of this call was a renunciation of marriage to embrace celibacy and paternity in order to collaborate in God's mysterious plans.

Every priest and seminarian know that accepting a call for God's purposes requires deep inward struggles, at times religious doubts, a need to work through logical contradictions, purification of legitimate male affective aspirations for we all know our eros needs real purification to move it into celibate agape. One cannot read the episode of Joseph's serious engagement with Mary and the disruption that God caused in his plans without realizing the personal struggle of his discipleship. Fr. Simeon Leiva Merikakis writes: "Joseph had to fight, and then triumph through faith and trust, over the confusion and suffering caused to him by the difficult mystery of his fatherhood. He cannot solve this mystery by human logic or Jewish traditions; only he can, not 'solve it', indeed welcome him with faith in the revelation that God made to him through the dream and speech of the angel."

Every priest/seminarian is on a long-life process of integration of his manhood. In the book I edited, *Spiritual Husbands-Spiritual Fathers*, Msgr. John Cihak sees this integration involving the roles of son, brother, husband,

and father. Becoming authentic in each of these dimensions involves a healing of our "relational brokenness" in view of ordering our eros to a life of celibate agape, so well explained by Pope Benedict in *Deus Caritas Est*, 3-18. Pope Francis chose the dimension of father as a prism to present St Joseph's relevancy to this era in his recent Apostolic Letter *Patris Corde* published in the midst of the pandemic on December 8, 2020 "to increase our love for this great saint, to encourage us to implore his intercession and to imitate his virtues and his zeal." Here is a synthesis of his main points:

St Joseph was a tender and loving father. For our paternity to reflect tender love, we need to acknowledge our frailties not as obstacles but to accept them with tender mercy. Joseph experienced fears but believed "that God can work even through our fears, our frailties and our weaknesses. He also teaches us that amid the tempests of life, we must never be afraid to let the Lord steer our course. At times we want to be in complete control, yet God always sees the bigger picture."

Joseph was an obedient father. "In every situation, Joseph declared his own 'fiat' like those of Mary at the Annunciation and Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane."

Joseph was an accepting father. "He is not passively resigned, but courageously and firmly proactive. In our own lives, acceptance and welcome can be an expression of the Holy Spirit's gift of fortitude. Only the Lord can give us the strength needed to accept life as it is, with all its contradictions, frustrations and disappointments."

Joseph was creatively a courageous father. "From St Joseph, we must learn to love the child and his mother, to love the sacraments and charity, to love the Church and the poor. Each of these realities is always the child and his mother."

Joseph was a working father. "From him Jesus learned the value and dignity and the joy of what means to eat bread that is the fruit of one's own labor."

Joseph was a father in the shadows. "Fathers are not born but made. A man does not become a father simply

ST. JOSEPH: OUR ROLE MODEL AND MENTOR

by bringing a child into the world, but by taking up the responsibility to care for that child. Whenever a man accepts responsibility for the life of another, in some way he becomes a father to that person...Joseph never made himself the center of things. He did not think of himself, but focused instead on the lives of Mary and Jesus.”

There is a rich iconography on St Joseph. The salient meditation of Pope Francis’ *Patris Cordis* renders a most attractive model for a shepherd of souls flourishing in his pastoral charity as father and husband of the parish community.

As we own our constant growth into Jesus as the new man, going frequently to St Joseph is a most solid way. He is known as a silent man because he was a man of a rich interior life, a contemplative. He was also a man of determination and action. Right after experiencing God’s

motions within his heart, he acted as heir of King David taking Mary to Bethlehem for the Son to inherit the dynastic and messianic promises. Later on, with courage he will take Mary and Jesus to Egypt as refugees due to a political persecution.

With Fr. Jean-Jacques Olier, the great promoter of priests and seminarians in France, I pray to Joseph: Blessed are you among men. Blessed are your arms which have fondled the Word made flesh. Blessed are your arms which have carried Him who keeps all things in existence. Blessed is your bosom on which the Son of God fondly rested. Blessed your heart aflame with the most ardent love.

**LET US GO TO ST. JOSEPH,
AS ST THERESE ADMONISHED
US TO DO AT ALL TIMES.**





OH ST. JOSEPH WHOSE PROTECTION IS SO GREAT, SO STRONG, SO PROMPT BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD, I PLACE IN YOU ALL MY INTERESTS AND DESIRES.
 OH ST. JOSEPH DO ASSIST ME BY YOUR POWERFUL INTERCESSION AND OBTAIN FOR ME FROM YOUR DIVINE SON ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD; SO THAT HAVING ENGAGED HERE BELOW YOUR HEAVENLY POWER I MAY OFFER MY THANKSGIVING AND HOMAGE TO THE MOST LOVING OF FATHERS.
 OH ST. JOSEPH, I NEVER WEARY CONTEMPLATING YOU AND JESUS ASLEEP IN YOUR ARMS. I DARE NOT APPROACH WHILE HE REPOSES NEAR YOUR HEART. PRESS HIM IN MY NAME AND KISS HIS FINE HEAD FOR ME, AND ASK HIM TO RETURN THE KISS WHEN I DRAW MY DYING BREATH.

ST. JOSEPH, PATRON OF DEPARTING SOULS, PRAY FOR US.
 AMEN.



The Fatherhood of the Priestly Vocation

Reflections on the Priesthood, Fatherhood, and the Joy of Self-Gift

REV. FERDINAND SANTOS

Rector-President

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?... Feed my sheep."

These past couple of months, yet another group of my former students were ordained, some to the transitional diaconate, the rest to the priesthood. They're all solid, extremely generous and kind young men who, even as students in seminary, showed a tremendous love and care for the church, the People of God. Those who have now become priests will find themselves addressed, for the rest of their lives, as "Father."

A couple of years ago, while back home, I had the opportunity to get together with some grade school classmates whom I haven't seen in years. Over dinner, and after recounting old stories about ourselves as students, the teachers we had and some of the silly and crazy things we did as kids, we shared stories of what we've been doing since we parted ways after graduation: our line of work, the relationships we've had, family, plans for the future.

At one point the conversation turned to the topic of children. (They were all married and had kids.) One of my friends has a daughter who's already in her twenties, another just had a baby (whose photos he and his beautiful wife posted online just a few weeks before), another spoke of how proud he was about his very bright daughters, still another told us his young boy was going to school at our own alma mater.

Eventually of course—and I knew it was bound to happen—one of my friends looked at me and said, "Hey, you and Rick (a classmate who wasn't present) are the only ones who aren't married yet!" And then they started laughing. "What's it like?" one of them asked. "You know, being a priest...not having a wife, not having kids..." he continued.

"What's it like?" There we were, five men, four who were proud fathers, dads, and one whom each of the four fathers called "father" yet had no biological children of his own. I probably could've asked each of them the same question, "What's it like? Being married...having children?" But I didn't have to. There was no need. It was enough to just sit there with these good friends, and

for just a few brief seconds, to allow the depth, but also the humor of the moment to sink in. They were fathers; but so was I. They had children, and so did I. They were proud of their kids; I've always found joy in the students and people whose lives, even briefly, cross mine.

Yesterday, at the gym, one of the guys working out had two of his young children in tow, a boy who was probably eight or nine, and a little girl who I'm guessing was five or six. His daughter he left in the play area where a lady takes care of the little tykes who tag along with their parents; but his son, he took along with him, and both father and son got on two adjacent treadmills. At one point, the little boy pushed the stop button and said, "Dad, I'm done," then he got off and sat on the edge of the machine, waiting for his father to finish.

"What a beautiful sight," I thought, "a dad and his son, doing something fun together." Then, out of nowhere, came a thought that's crossed my mind on many occasions: "I'm never going to be called 'dad.' No one's ever going to call me 'dad.'" [But then I suddenly remembered I was halfway through a rep with a 120-pound curl bar - which I almost dropped. Reflecting or even thinking too much during workouts is never a good idea; that's how injuries happen. You don't think; you just lift.]

One of the Sunday Gospel readings after Easter, records what is perhaps one of the most moving exchanges between Jesus and the disciple who was to eventually lead the apostolic band that was to be left behind. Peter who, in many places in each of the four gospels is portrayed as someone who seemingly opens his mouth only to put his foot in it, is shown in that particular reading as someone whose journey towards a deeper understanding of his response to Jesus' call, takes a more profound and significant turn.

"Do you love me?" Jesus asks Peter three times. And three times Peter answers, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." (Some scripture commentators have said that the three questions and the three accompanying replies whereby Peter professes his love for Jesus are meant to signify, on



the one hand, Jesus' forgiveness of Peter for the latter's threefold denial, and on the other hand, Peter's overcoming of the very fear, weakness, and lack of faith that had led him to deny Jesus in the first place.)

After each of the questions, of course, and after each reply, Jesus gives Peter the same commission given to everyone who seeks to be a shepherd of God's people—we who are priests, and those who have the great privilege to have sons or daughters call them "dad": "Feed my sheep."

Years ago, as a seminary student, I remember telling my spiritual director that I thought I could be a good dad, and that part of me wishes I could in fact have children of my own. Whenever I see former seminary classmates who have eventually discerned a call to married life, who happen to have a son or daughter in tow, or guys who have their kids along with them, like at the gym yesterday, I couldn't help—to this day—but remember what I said to my spiritual director.

But I also recall, quite vividly in fact, what his reply to me was. "It's good to feel that way. There's absolutely nothing wrong with such thoughts or feelings. They're normal. In fact, if you didn't feel or think that way, I'd be really concerned."

Then Father John spoke those words that I'd hear, again and again, spoken—albeit in different ways—by many good and amazing priests I've encountered both as a student and later on as a priest myself:

"A good priest is one who would also be a good dad. And a good dad is really much like a good shepherd of God's people."

A father is the shepherd of his family, the provider, protector, model and guide to his children and his wife. A priest—one who is himself called "father"—acts and serves in very much the same capacity, performs the same role, and is tasked with not much different a responsibility, not to a wife and biological children of course, but to Christ's flock briefly entrusted to his care, protection, and guidance. "A good priest is one who would also be a good dad."

WHAT'S A GOOD FATHER like though? Over the years, as I've journeyed with students and other men and women who have come to see me either for spiritual direction or counseling, I've jotted down some thoughts they've shared with me about what they thought a good father would be like. On a number of occasions these individuals have in fact struggled with their own difficulties and challenges with their own fathers, and so a good portion of what they've shared actually involves what they "wished" their fathers could have been.

Last night, before going to bed, with the memory of that dad and his kids at the gym still lingering in my mind, I pulled out my file (Yes, I have files on my computer going all the way back to 1991 when I was still a college seminarian) and read through some of the notes I've written. There were pages and pages of them, so





*“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you;
abide in my love.”*

FATHERHOOD OF THE PRIESTHOOD

I thought I'd simply include a few of the significant ones; the rest I'll share later, in a book perhaps, if I find the time to write one:

A good father is one who sets the vision for his family, orients his relationship with his wife as well as his children towards everything that is good, materially, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. And the highest good of course is God himself—who must be a father's pattern of steadfastness, strength, care, and love.

This isn't always easy, and the challenges one building a family may encounter can be immense. But a good father remains strong and steadfast. He must possess a focus and determination so fierce and a commitment and dedication so unshakeable that his wife and children will know that with him by their side, "all shall be well."

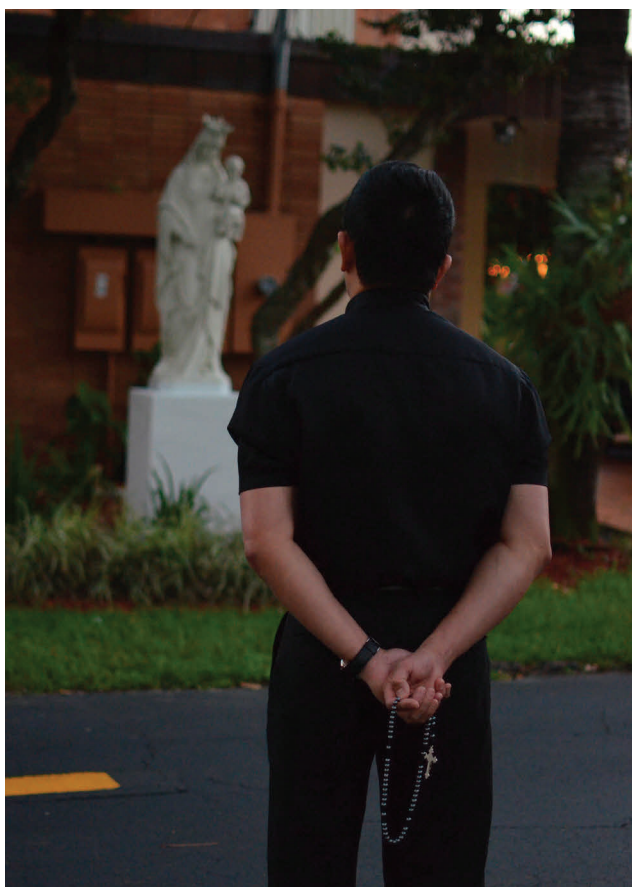
A good father strives to be the primary role model and guide—bar none—after which his sons and daughters can pattern their own lives. He must be their rock of certainty, their source of clarity, amidst the confusions and uncertainties of life, their pillar of strength when weakness assails them, their fortress in times of distress, and their ever-present source of courage.

His wife and his children must therefore know that they can always trust him and rely on his presence. He must be a man of his word, who not only keeps his promises but is likewise willing and ready to stand by the values and principles upon which he has built his own life.

A good father learns to be a good communicator, with his wife and his children. "Learns" – because this isn't always easy for us men, especially when it comes to what we feel. I've had a number of people, both men and women, who have, during spiritual direction or counseling, lamented the fact that they've never heard their fathers tell them he "loved" them. It's an all-too common

thing unfortunately; especially since we men believe that "actions speak louder than words."

A good father though is one who is brave enough to let his children know, not only what he thinks, but what he feels. This in no way detracts from our masculinity; in fact it intensifies it even more given that it involves conquering something we often dread doing. To speak our minds clearly and open our hearts to our children, encourages them to do the same. It gives them confidence and strength, and teaches them that there is power even in vulnerability.



A good father never raises his hand in anger. He may reprimand, admonish, at times even reproach and punish in order to keep his children on the "straight and narrow." While on occasion, he may even find a need to seriously consider the scriptural warning about "spoiling a child" when one "spares the rod," he will never allow his anger or a bad mood to cloud either the reason for reprimanding his child, or the love he has for him, which led him to impose punishment in the first place.

A good father knows when and how to say he's sorry, both to his wife when he has offended her, and to his children, when he has made a mistake, has been too harsh towards them, or fails them in any way. There is perhaps nothing

sweeter to a child, nothing more helpful in teaching him true humanity, especially the young whose minds are at the early stages of growth and maturity, than sincere and heartfelt words of apology from a father.

For in admitting his mistakes, whatever these might be, a father shows not weakness, but a profound strength which becomes a lesson to his children in being realistic about life. Apologizing for a mistake allows a child the opportunity to know that no matter how lofty one's ideals might be—and they should be—one can fall short. But that's alright; because one can admit one's failing,

survive the fall, pick up the pieces, and still look forward to something better.

Similarly, there is perhaps nothing more hurtful and confusing to a child, nothing more detrimental to his growth as a well-adjusted human being, than a father's awkward silence or, worse, defensiveness, after having committed a mistake.

A good father is always present; he must always be "there" for his children. There is nothing more helpful in building a child's inner resources of strength, courage, and confidence in taking the risks that are necessary for a happy and fulfilled life than the awareness of his or her father's presence. There are two types of 'presence' of course: physical and spiritual. While a father may not always be physically present to his children (there are many demands placed on the shoulder of a provider), he must be "present" to them nonetheless, i.e. they must know and feel that they are secure, cared for, loved, and most of all, protected, even if he isn't actually around.

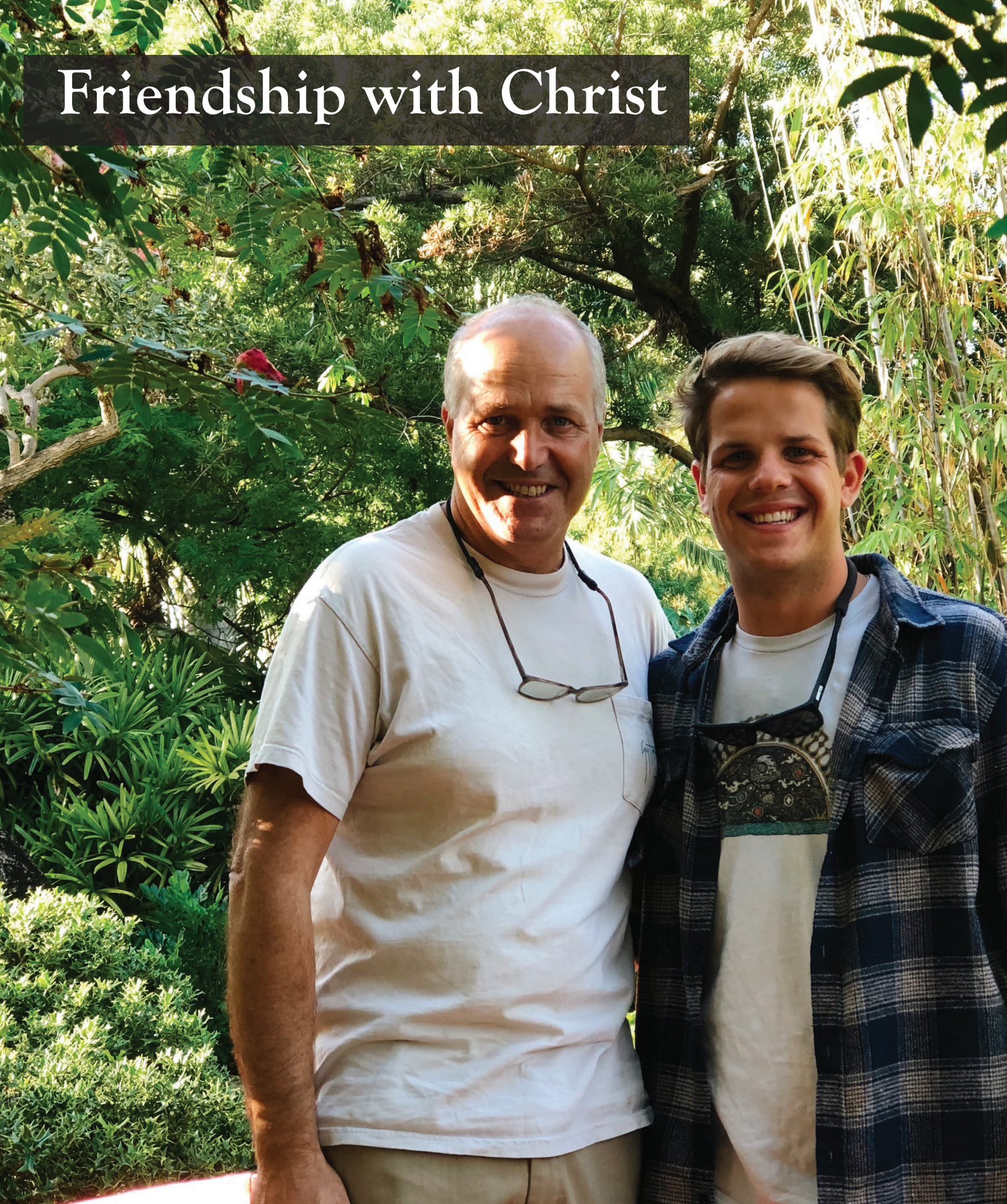
Similarly, there is nothing more harmful to a child than that lack of a sense of security, that feeling that things aren't going to be alright, that he or she has to somehow fend for himself because that "storehouse" of courage, strength, determination, and confidence—which a father ought to be—is simply not there.

A good father does his best to become a true "friend" to his children without at the same time, losing sight of the fact that he will always be more than that; for he is the head of his family, its guide, its shepherd.

A good father must never cease to learn, to grow in wisdom, to mature, to expand his horizon, to enlarge his consciousness and awareness of the world, especially the world which his children inhabit, and which they are to inherit. His care for his family must therefore extend to a care for others, for society, and for the world. This, after all, is the legacy he shall be leaving behind. As such, he is his children's first and foremost teacher, and the single greatest lesson he can teach them is the lesson of growth, of expansion, of enlargement, of transcendence, and of courage in the face of all these.



Friendship with Christ





FILIPPO SCHIAVO

*Fourth-Year Philosophy
Diocese of St. Augustine*

Seminary formation is a transformation in Christ. Men who come to seminary come to sit at the feet of the Master, to listen to His Word, and to be changed by His teachings. We spend up to ten years growing in virtue, submersing our lives in Scripture, and partaking at the Heavenly Banquet to conform ourselves fully to Christ the Head. At St. John Vianney College Seminary, we begin this transformation in Christ by growing in the four dimensions of Formation with special emphasis in human and spiritual development. As the foundational level of priestly formation, college seminary gives us the tools to grow in deep unity with Jesus Christ through prayer, in likeness of Jesus Christ through developmental conferences, and in pastoral care like Jesus Christ through community life. Like the Apostles, the journey of becoming a new man in Christ happens over time. At the end of the journey, the goal of seminary formation is for us, the seminarians, to be able to say, as St. Paul did, "...it is no longer I that live, but Christ that lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

Hello, my name is Filippo Schiavo; I am a seminarian for the Diocese of St. Augustine, Florida. I am a senior at St. John Vianney College Seminary and serve as Student Body President. My time at St. John Vianney has been a time marked by tremendous growth and a deepening of the vocation God has invited me to partake in. Entering seminary following my senior year of high-school has allowed me to experience a drastic maturation process while in formation. Upon coming to seminary, I was given many tools to develop my humanity and grow in my relationship with Christ. Our rector continually shares with us that "grace builds on nature" and that "the foundations we build in our primary years of priestly formation will serve as the strong ground which many years of priestly ministry can build on." It is the foundations that are built in daily prayer, rigorous academics, and pastoral ministry that serve as the means for affective maturity.

Each year of formation has revealed different aspects of my humanity which need to be given to Christ to allow Him to transform me into His instrument. Praying with the lives of the Apostles, I find many parallels to their years with Jesus and ours in seminary. Seminary formation is in a constant state of reformation to more closely model the "formational" years the Apostles had with Jesus. In the years they were together, Jesus taught the Apostles many things. We read in the Gospels of the many conversations, encounters, and teaching moments Jesus had with the twelve separately from the rest of the crowds. Jesus taught them how to pray, how to minister, how to proclaim; similarly, in seminary we are taught these many things and given the tools for ministry. Yet, all these great tools seminary equips us with are shallow unless we know the real reason we are called to share in the ministerial priesthood. That reason is friendship with Jesus Christ.





Throughout my time in seminary, I have been given many “tools” for ministry through classes, conferences, and personal meetings. The greatest moments of formation, however, happen in silence: the silence of prayer. Prayer is the means by which the authentic transformation takes place and we begin to become instruments in God’s hand. We begin to learn who He is, not just as an abstract idea or a as a great moral teacher who can make one’s life better but as a person, a friend. Four years into this journey with Jesus Christ has taught me one thing about allowing myself to be transformed: this transformation only takes place in prayer.

There are many mind-blowing moments in seminary. From the classroom, personal formation meetings, and conferences, the wisdom of the Holy Spirit fills our formators and animates all conversations which leaves one continually in awe and wonder at the greatness of God’s work in the world. We develop keen self-awareness in seminary as well,

and we are pushed to grow in lives of virtue. When I contemplate the great men, the endless knowledge, the fruitful conversations, the care of the formation team, and the immediacy of the sacraments, often-times I think seminary is what I consider Heaven will be like. In all this goodness, however, all of it is utter superficiality if we do not remember why we are here: to grow in friendship with Jesus. As our rector states continuously: “The only reason you are in seminary is to be friends with Jesus. All else is secondary.” While he is not saying that the academics, community life, and pastoral formation are unimportant, our rector reminds us that at the center of all our lives, those called to priesthood and not, is our relationship with Jesus. He is the face of the Heavenly Father, and He is the one who will bring us to fulfill our vocation.

In my time in seminary, I have learned so many wonderful things about life, others, God, and myself; yet the one thing I hope to pass on to my brothers as their Student Body President is that prayer is every-

thing. Oftentimes when I share my vocation story to children, I use the analogy of two friends living life. I describe that in life when one has a friend who is very dear, the two friends will do everything together. The friends will do the same activities, share deep conversations, and make decisions based on the interest of the friend. I tell them, “Guys, I have a dear friend whose name is Jesus.” It is my friendship with Jesus Christ, more than any other friendship, that has become the friendship I love most. Love changes everything. When we love someone, we will do good for that person, we will change for that person, we will sacrifice for that person.

Throughout my time in seminary, the greatest evolution of my life has been falling in love with Jesus Christ. It is this falling in love that has changed my humanity, brought me to a mature (yet still childish) point in my development, and allowed me to respond “YES,” as our Blessed Mother and St. Joseph did, to God’s invitation to allow Him to work in and with our lives.

May we all, seminarians, priests, and laity, learn to respond to God’s call in our lives. To hear His voice, see His work in the world, and feel His presence in the sacraments are signs that Jesus Christ is speaking to you personally with the words He spoke to St. Peter: “Do you love me? Feed my sheep.” When He speaks those words to us, may we, like all the saints before us, respond: “Yes, Lord, I love you!”



SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

PURSUING THE TRUTH

ERICH VAZQUEZ

First-Year, Pre-Theology
Archdiocese of Miami



*“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
(John 14:6)*

My vocation story is a small echo of this powerful revelation that Our Lord gave to His Apostles during the Last Supper before He would complete his salvific work through His death and resurrection. What particularly strikes me about this verse is the identification that Jesus makes with the “Truth.”



Having come from a family of Cuban immigrants that fled an atheist regime, my family understood what it meant to have a strong Catholic faith in the face of a society that was hostile to it. My family also understood the importance of education in a two-fold way, in order to advance career-wise in this country and, more importantly, in order to become a better person. These two insights would provide the seeds that would later grow to become my vocation.

Having gone to secular schools all my life, I met and made friends with people of diverse backgrounds who had different creeds and those with no creeds; however, having gone and studied at Doral Academy, a college preparatory charter middle and high school, these friends and acquaintances were also highly intelligent and with exceptional academic prestige. Though we were young, my friends and I would have intellectually mature conversations about almost anything, from politics to economics to physics and mathematics. Nonetheless, what concerned me the most were the fundamental questions like those concerning God, the soul, and knowledge. In other words, I was concerned with philosophical questions and wanted good answers to these, answers that would lead to being “Truth” and nothing else.

At the same time, I did engage in apologetics in which I would attempt to defend the Faith from objections by Protestants and atheists alike. By God’s grace, a teacher by the name of Mr. Muñiz had formed a philosophy club and soon began offering philosophy classes. I took his philosophy class my senior year and it was life-changing. The philosophical training that I received was magnificent and due to this training, I was able to intellectually solidify my Catholic faith, and it inspired me to further study philosophy in college. I had the option of attending a Catholic university, but since I was willing to test the validity of the teachings of the Catholic Church for the sake of the “Truth,” I attended a secular college and then a secular university. I thank God for having gone to Miami-Dade College and Florida International University where secular-minded professors challenged me to go even deeper into my studies, and it was because of those challenges that I started reading and understanding the Doctor Communis, the Common Doctor in St. Thomas Aquinas. It was then that I saw that work of Divine Providence since my home parish is St. Dominic Catholic Church, and I received all my sacraments from the priests of the Order of Preachers, the same Order

that Aquinas was a part of. St. Thomas and the scholastic philosophical tradition that followed him afterward provided clarity on the “Truth” that is Jesus Christ and His Church.

The more I discovered the Truth of the Faith, the more I fell in love with the Beauty of the Faith which propelled me to do Good on behalf of the Faith. For that reason, I participated in the work of youth ministry through high school and college. Such Ministries were Encuentros Juveniles, Encuentros Familiares, S.W.A.G. from Good Shepherd Parish, and John 3:6teen from my own parish. Specifically, working in retreats allowed me to appreciate the work of priests especially when people would come for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I was also a Catechist teacher during college, and I realized that I enjoyed teaching and catechizing. In addition, I had been an altar server

since I was in middle school. Having realized that I enjoyed the liturgy, ministry, catechizing, along with the dynamics of the Church in Miami, I was not afraid of the calling of the Lord to be a priest of the Archdiocese of Miami.

The calling of the priesthood came before I attended college. Yet, I pushed it aside asking the Lord to allow me to finish college and then to discern His will. In His merciful love, this is what transpired and soon after that, I entered seminary as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Miami. I thank Almighty God for my vocation along with family and friends that have contributed to the realization of my vocation. It was Truth that brought me to the heart of the Church and the heart of my vocation, and it is the Truth that is not just an object to be known but a Person to live with and for in Christ Jesus.







More Than A Father

REV. MICHAEL GARCIA

Alumni

“I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.” 2nd Timothy 4:7-8

That was one of my dad’s favorite passages from scripture. My dad was a person who always reminded us that our ultimate purpose was to live a life of sanctity and get into heaven. He would always remind us how the things of this world are always passing, that our gaze must always be focused on Christ – the authentic Christ, the Christ we find in scripture, the Bridegroom of the Church, the one who offers Himself every time we celebrate Mass. My father, Carlos, was a faithful son of the Church, a devoted father, and a loving husband. When I took homiletics in the seminary, they would teach us to be careful not to canonize the deceased, that it was not left to our judgment, but rather left to the Divine Judge. So I won’t be doing that.

Yes, my father had his faults and he was acutely aware of them. In fact, I believe he was too hard on himself. I saw him actively trying to overcome his shortcomings, and I believe he suffered most of his purgatory here on earth. As the book of Wisdom said: “Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself.”

My dad’s all time favorite Bible verse was John 14:15, “If you love me,” said the Lord, “you will keep my commandments.” I can’t tell you how many times he repeated that quote to both my brother and me, and he truly lived

by those words. My dad was truly the high priest of our domicile church growing up. Every day after school, when I was in high school, he would sit my brother and me down, and we would read a chapter from the Bible – beginning with Genesis, and finally ending with the book of Revelation. He knew that faith began first in the home. My brother and I never went to Catholic school, but my dad never depended on Catechism classes or even Sunday sermons from a priest for our faith formation. He knew such a baptismal responsibility was too precious to be left for someone else. He truly understood that he was a spiritual father, first and foremost. I owe my priesthood to him.

His greatest mission was to bring Christ to others, most especially to his own family. He had such a love for family, that the sacrifices he made will be remembered for generations to come. When my family lived in GA and he would visit Miami on vacation (with the limited vacation he had), he would make it a point to visit Tio Evelio and Tio Edilio, because as he put it, “They are the only ones who can’t drive to visit me.” When Tia Elisa was in the nursing facility, he would visit her very often, and when Tio Juan Ines was later there too, he also visited him often. He loved them both so much especially Juan Ines whom he admired greatly. He loved his mother and father-in-law like they were his own parents and he would fix any electronic problem my abuelo, Pancho, would have.



His main reason for moving back down to Miami was to be with family. When My cousins Carlos and Kristy began having kids, he would often say that he wanted to be a part of their children’s lives. It brought him great joy when Kristy, his goddaughter, asked him to baptize Ava, her daughter. How often do you get to have your child baptized by your own godfather? With the home my parents’ bought when they moved back to Miami, he setup our backyard to host parties and to bring families together. He brought the light of Christ to every house he entered.

He was the way he was because he had a mother who never gave up on him. Her prayers fed and continue to feed our family. My dad always gave 100% because she always gave 100%. We need to support her with our own prayers more than ever.

My dad sent out a letter to our family a couple of months ago. Although he tended to send a lot of emails, he never sent a pages-long letter before. Looking at it now, it’s almost as though God impelled him to deliver this final message before he departed us. In the letter, he used the Wedding at Cana as a metaphor for how we are to cooperate with God’s will. He made it a point to show that God could’ve easily made wine appear inside the jars without the help of the servers, but he chose to use the waiters, that is, humanity, to have them cooperate intimately in the work of salvation. My dad wrote:



MORE THAN A FATHER

“Our Lord could have made it easy, but He didn't. He chose to have men first exhaust themselves in the work proper to them — physically toiling in the material world. And St. John specifically records for us that they filled the jars with water to the brim, meaning they could not add anything more. God desires that humanity be intimately involved in the work of salvation. They had done everything they could possibly do. They left it all on the field, to use the expression from sports. Then, and only then, does God say, ‘Thank you. Now step back and behold.’ It is the utmost privilege to be chosen to participate with Christ in His salvation.”

My dad gave of himself until the brim was full and not another drop could be added. I know my dad's sacrifice was not in vain and as painful as this has been for me, I have to trust now that God is telling me: “Thank you. Now step back and behold.” I don't question why

this had to happen and I never will because I know that God's ways are often not our ways and His plan is infinitely better than our plans. The best way to honor my dad, is for us to be drawn closer to Christ, to make an active choice to know, love and serve Him. This life is passing. Everything perishes, but as Christ, Himself, said: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Jesus tells us that he will never leave us orphaned, and I know my dad will always be there for my mom, brother, and me. My dad had a big heart, and he desires nothing more than for all of us to be united together one day before the presence of our Heavenly Father.

Glory be to God, now, and forever.





“In revealing and in reliving on earth the very fatherhood of God, a man is called upon to ensure the harmonious and united development of all the members of the family.” - St. John Paul II

Humility, harmony, and faithfulness are the words Deacon Carlos would always utter to me every time I came to him with a challenge either within my personal life or some technological problem. Deacon Carlos truly showed his love for the people of God by giving of himself wholly and entirely. In the short time I knew Deacon Carlos I encountered a caring person, a compassionate person, a wonderful human being, and an awesome father. Deacon Carlos lived a life fully dedicated to Our Lord and it was by virtue of this relationship that he aided us in every step of our lives!

- Christopher Curry



"The mark of a great man is one who knows when to set aside the important things in order to accomplish the vital ones."

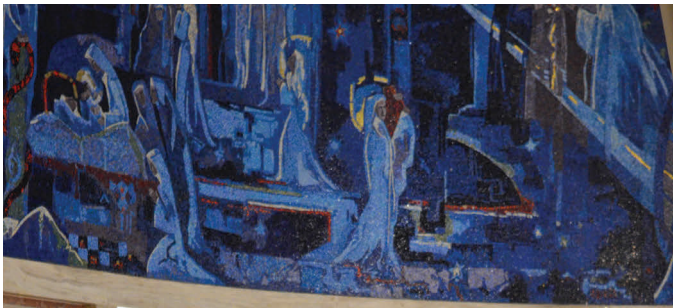
I think that Deacon Carlos Garcia was the living proof of this quote. When I walked into his office the first time to meet with him as my formation advisor, he was on the phone wrapping up a problem over in the Maintenance Shed. As I waited for him to finish, I remember looking at his desk and seeing the sticky notes he had arranged, dated and put in order. They all had reminders of problems, projects, or work that he needed to deal with each in a different capacity. As the only IT personnel in the seminary, Deacon Carlos had a heavy workload trying to establish a solid internet connection in four separate buildings which had been built in 1960 out of brick and concrete... about three decades prior to the invention of Wi-Fi. On top of that Deacon Carlos was the Plant Manager of the Seminary and in charge of the maintenance team which made sure 60 young men didn't destroy the place. As I sat in an arm chair waiting, I looked at the huge picture that Deacon Carlos had of him serving at his son's first Mass and I asked myself, "Why am I here? He has so many other things he has to deal with right now." When I raised this concern to Deacon Carlos he laughed for a bit and with that smile of his which I could only characterize as paternal he replied, "Well you see my job is to help you, it's my calling." You see, to Deacon Carlos you weren't a job, or a problem solve, you were a person in need of advice, encouragement, or simply a quiet word of reassurance. To say that I wish we could have had Deacon Carlos with us longer is an understatement; however, the impression he left upon us all is timeless, and the memory of his humble service to us will remain long after we've left the hallowed halls that he so often walked.

- Esteban Merkt



One of the greatest gifts of seminary formation is many encounters one has with wholesome, genuine, and holy people. In my four years at St. John Vianney I have met many people who allow the Lord to animate and direct their lives. These people are the people I would consider closest to Our Lord and who allow the Holy Spirit to work through them. Among these people was Deacon Carlos Garcia. Deacon Carlos was a man in love with the Lord, a man dedicated to his vocation, and a man who sought every moment to serve. He truly lived out his vocational roles as father, deacon, and formator. As a father, Deacon Carlos was fully present and deeply in love with his wife, their two sons, and all their extended family. I remember how fondly Deacon Carlos would speak of his family and explain what a gift it was to be a husband and a father. As a deacon, he was a man dedicated to the heart of the diaconate, namely, service. Deacon Carlos was a man of impressive reliability and honesty. He would give of his time joyfully and patiently, and he truly considered it a gift to serve. As a formator, he was an instrument of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all who came to him. I had the blessing to have Deacon Carlos as a personal formator for some of my time in formation. Something that struck me so deeply was Deacon Carlos' awareness and care in all of our interactions. He was deeply invested in every word and action which came from the person sitting in front of him. Knowing his work schedule, I was aware of the list of things he needed to accomplish, and yet every bit of Deacon Carlos' attention was focused on the person he was with. I will deeply miss Deacon Carlos and his joyful, peaceful self. Deacon Carlos has formed many holy, joyful, and selfless priests, and his gift of himself to others lives on in all those with whom his life crossed paths.

- *Filippo Schiavo*





HOLY WEEK 2021





NO CHRIST WITHOUT THE CROSS NO CROSS WITHOUT THE CRUCIFIED

Rev. Ferdinand Santos

Rector-President

“When Christ bids you come, He bids you come and die.”

These are lines written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Protestant theologian who was murdered by the Nazis in World War II. Bonhoeffer stood up to Hitler while many of his countrymen chose to compromise.

“When Christ bids you come, He bids you come and die.”

There is an inevitable dying that comes with following Christ, and a cutting-off of those things that hinder this. Archbishop Fulton Sheen once talked about wanting Christ but not the cross, and Pope John Paul used to talk about the world wanting Christ and being drawn to him, but retreating when it realizes that one simply cannot have Christ without his cross.

Jesus and his cross are inextricably linked. A disciple must take them both. He cannot pick one and refuse the other.

The error of Christ without the cross reveals a mistaken view of what the Gospel entails. Too often, it means softening, even lowering the tough demands of Jesus. The therapeutic pop psychology of the last couple of decades is a clear embodiment of Christ without his cross. Its mantra is: *“be good to yourself, love yourself, pamper yourself, you deserve it, you deserve all of it.”* It’s the gospel of compromise with the world, not the gospel of Christ.

But is this view completely wrong? Of course not. We *should* love ourselves and be kind to ourselves. But there’s something missing. Love for ourselves must never neglect the need to challenge ourselves, to be responsible and accountable, to demand that we do what God asks of us.

Detaching Christ from his cross is to buy into the empty promises of quick and easy fixes that we can see in the lives of so many today. It’s the mentality of the “instant everything”. Forget the painstaking effort, just cut corners, forget commitment and dedication, forget the inevitable challenge that comes with doing something really

well. I want it, and I want it now, the easier the better.

To detach Christ from his cross is to take the easy road, the wide road, the road that ultimately leads to nowhere. “The good enough,” Thomas Aquinas reminds us, “is the enemy of the good.”

But there is also the opposite mistake—that of taking the cross without the crucified. Without Jesus, the cross can deteriorate into a symbol of harshness, of a religion that is overly-demanding, hard, rigid, unforgiving, even unreasonable.

To detach the cross from Christ is to become like the Pharisees in Scripture: good men, but harsh, unforgiving, and constantly laying burdens on others which they themselves are unwilling to bear. To take the cross and neglect the crucified is to forget the very reason why Jesus died on the cross in the first place: to free us from the chains that hinder us from realizing how much God loves us.

In what is perhaps the only major document he issued during his papacy, Albino Luciani, Pope John Paul I, said something very interesting. “God is a Father,” the good pope said. He demands that we do what is right and be responsible. Like a Father, he is just, rewards goodness and punishes evil. But God is “like a Mother as well,” loving, caring and compassionate. His arms are always open, ready to forgive.

“When Christ bids us come, he bids us, come and die.”

He bids us die to a faith that can be too soft and comfortable, that seeks only ease and convenience. But he also invites us to die to a faith that can be too hard and overbearing, that lays so heavy a burden, both on ourselves as well as others.

“There is no Christ without the cross; there is no cross without the crucified.”



**rites and
forms of
the Mass**



PHOTO: CALEB MALEC / ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

DURING HOLY WEEK, the seminary community had the opportunity to observe the history and uniqueness of the Catholic Church through the different rites of the Church and forms of the Mass. There are six rites of the Catholic Church: the Latin Rite (our Roman Rite), Alexandrian Rite, West Syrian Rite, Armenian Rite, East Syrian Rite, and Constantinopolitan Rite. These rites have their origins in distinct cultural backgrounds while all proclaiming the same Catholic Faith.

We are blessed to have two priests in residence who possess dual faculties to celebrate in the Syro-Malabar and Maronite Rites respectively. Both rites have unique liturgies that reflect the cultures in which they originated. In our participation in the Holy Week liturgies, it was interesting to see how each rite developed the same Mass and to see how they compared to the Roman Rite.

Additionally, we were able to celebrate the Mass in the Extraordinary Form. This form of the Mass was the common liturgy for the Roman Catholic Church prior to the mid-twentieth century. Participating in the Extraordinary Form enabled seminarians to fully experience a different form of the liturgy within our own Roman Catholic Rite, as well as track the liturgical development of the Mass. May we continue to learn and grow in the faith of our fathers to fully appreciate the Liturgy of the Church as it has developed in all parts of the world!



SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT



GOD'S PURSUIT

HEATH FULMER

*First-Year Pre-Theology
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee*

“Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me, all the days of my life.” - Psalm 23:6

Christianity is different. I’ve heard it said that all other religions are about man’s search for God. Christianity is unique as it’s about God’s search for us. Not only is this our story as Christians, this is my story. God came in pursuit of me.

I never gave much thought about God. I probably should’ve as I grew up in a Catholic family in Destin, Florida but it never mattered to me, I never even really thought much about God as a little kid other than what my parents told me. As I grew older I actively started moving away from my Catholic roots in ways that weren’t even conscious to me at the time. I started believing lies about myself and who I was, and in my adolescence, I was shaping up to be another hedonistic teenager on the hunt for girls and for all the ways that I could be “cool.” It was around 8th grade that someone stepped in to totally transform my life, I call her Mom.

My mother saw the way that I was growing up and made a change. She saw that I had no faith in God whatsoever, that her children were not Catholic and that in her vocation to pass on the Christian faith she was failing. So she made a choice, not a popular one with me I might add, and yet looking back now I can see that this wasn’t just the work of my mom, these were the footsteps of a Father running after His lost son. She forced me to start attending mass every week, confirmation classes, and



youth group which I thought at the time were “bogus.” The first week after my mom instituted this change would find me hiding in the bathroom during mass and then sulking for an entire youth group. That is until the unthinkable happened. During a routine after-youth-group Our Father prayer I felt something, Someone, that would redirect the course of my life. As I prayed the Our Father, I had a profound sense that God was real, that I didn’t know Him, and, as naive as I was, I knew that the prayer I prayed was beautiful and I had to pray it more.

Thus began my awareness of the Father’s hand in my life. He had first pursued me, and now I reciprocated. My life became a sprint towards God and glory to Him. He made me to run! I didn’t just dip my toe in relationship with God; I ran spiritually to Him with total abandonment. At least until I hit a stumbling block and would trip and fall away.

By the time I had finished high school I was on fire for God and would go off to Florida State University burning with love for Him. But what I didn’t realize is how strong the world can be, and I experienced some of the lies that deeply attack our identity. My first year in college would be so difficult as I fought for my faith in a culture that didn’t believe and made me feel

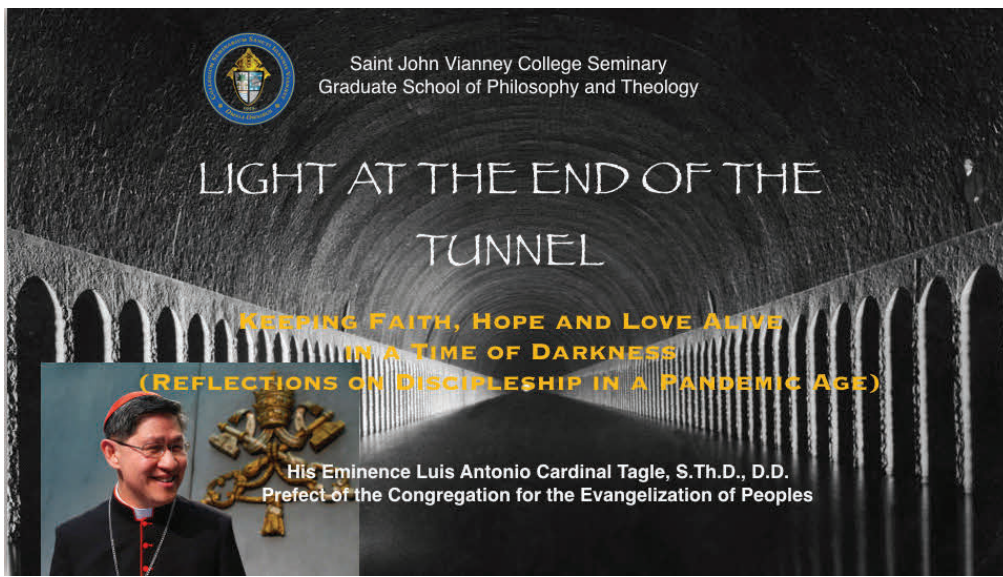
so small for what I believed and the way I lived. Everything I valued about my life seemed to crumble away. Friends, relationships, grades, even my very identity felt stripped away from me because I held onto my faith in the faithless world of college. Even worse it felt like God wasn't there or that He didn't care about my cries and my struggle. It was then in my freshman year of college that I would renounce my faith and deny my God. It was in this darkest time in my life that the Father would reveal His heart to me. A year and a half later I would find myself on a bench on the campus at Florida State whispering so that only the wind could hear, "Why am I so unhappy, what's missing?" It was then that I would hear the words on my heart, "My God whom I should love above all things." The words of the Act of Contrition. The words of Confession. My Father was running after me. He wanted me home.

In His pursuit of me the Father would offer me His mercy, His forgiveness, His very Heart. I have never felt a love like that, a love that could forgive my denial of Him. That love shot me like an arrow out into the world, an arrow that would deliver the truth of

the Gospel and of what God had done in my life. After college I would become a college missionary with the organization Saint Paul's Outreach in order to evangelize college students who were experiencing what I had gone through and to give them the hope and the joy of the Gospel. It was on mission that I would discern the call to go to seminary.

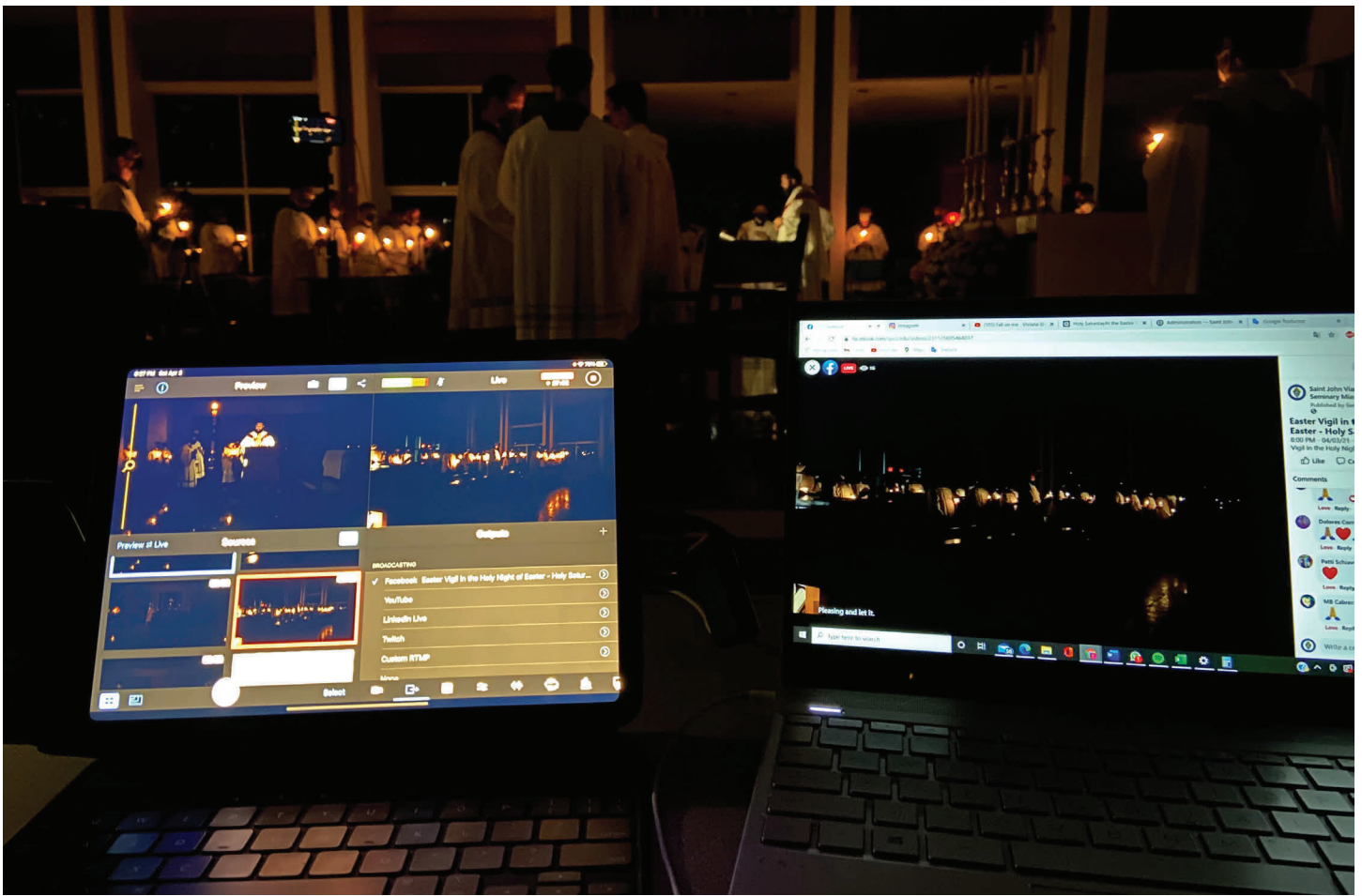
My life is a response. A pursuit of Him who first pursued me. A life where I strive to be a witness of our Good Father who runs after His children. I testify to this and seek to give my life to the truth that God Our Father seeks for us all, that He loves us. I want my life to bear witness to this. Pray for me and my brother seminarians as we discern God's call in our lives.





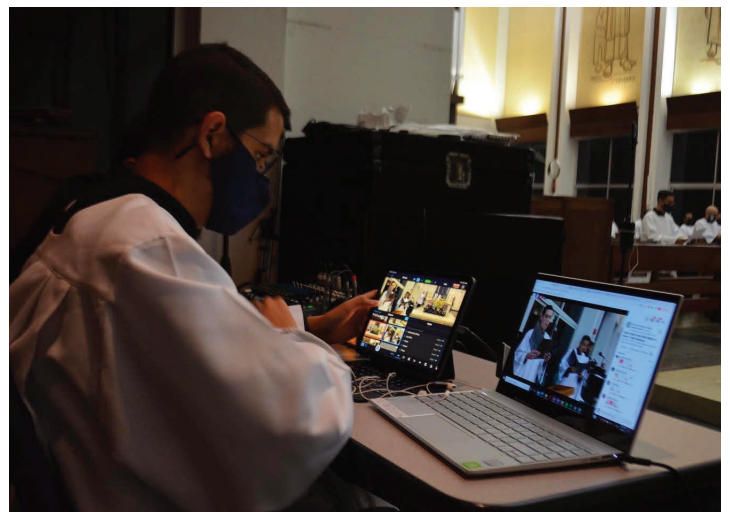
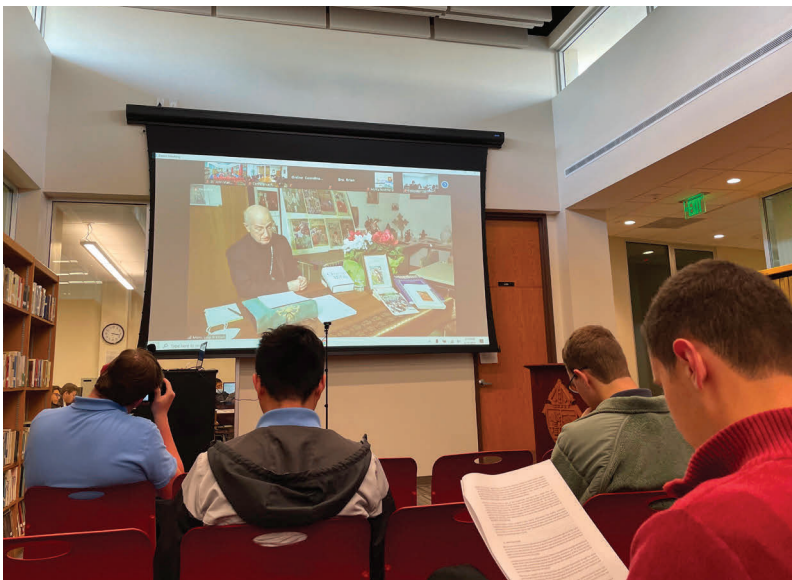
VIRTUAL VISIT WITH A CARDINAL





FORMATION IN A DIGITAL AGE







The Role of Mystery: In Light of Faith and Reason

Ari Lima
Second-Year Pre-Theologian

My personal interest in the topic of mystery comes from my own experience of mystery, and I believe it is at the heart of my vocation. I don't think I would be in seminary now if I wasn't captivated by the mystery present in my life that led me to ask questions and dive further into the Catholic faith at a time when many of my friends and family seemed to be leaving it behind. One of the things I love about the Catholic Church is that it values reason and revelation as necessary to arrive at the meaning of our reality and truth pertaining to our salvation, yet, it doesn't claim to have *all* the answers to life's questions.

What happens when our search for meaning encounters a mystery? What happens when our hunger for answers and thirst for knowledge brings us to the edge of a cliff and we realize we do not have full knowledge and our understanding is incomplete? Mystery causes us to wonder. We wonder at our capacity to know and yet not know. The more I learn and experience, the more I wonder how much is there that I do not know and may never know in this life? The sciences attempt to search for methodical explanations, which is noble and good, as it makes use of the gifts of reason and intellect. However, what is also valuable as part of our human experience is that which lacks explanation and brings us to the limit of our knowledge. So, while we learn and progress more each day and reflect on the events of history to deepen our knowledge and wisdom, there is always more to be discovered. Total knowledge belongs only to God.

What is mystery?

We hear the word quite often, especially if one is studying in a Catholic seminary. It is used in the liturgy and in prayers. We often hear phrases like "the sacred mysteries," "the mystery of faith," and "mysteries of the rosary." It comes up in philosophy classes such as the mystery of being in metaphysics and also in conversations with family and friends, but what does mystery really involve? According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* by Gerhard Kittel, "The etymology of the word and exact origin of the concept is itself a mystery, however, there is a general consensus that a mystery, or *mysterion* in Greek, is "something on which silence must be kept." We often

keep silence on matters out of reverence, humility, and lack of understanding. Even the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, responsible for correct teaching and dogma, is in a continuous process of unpacking that which has been revealed. Fr. Perales mentioned in our introduction to Catechism course, "A major part of the Judeo-Christian faith is contemplating the mystery, entering the mystery, teaching the mystery, but always acknowledging that it is a mystery."

Rudolf Otto's *Mysterium Tremendum*

Rudolf Otto was a German philosopher and theologian who is most known for his book, *The Idea of the Holy*. His work examines and highlights the importance of the non-rational factor in the idea of the Divine and its relation to the rational. Non-rational is not the same as irrational which implies the non-sensical or absurdity. Non-rational here refers to that which is beyond reason, in the sense of something that cannot be brought under a concept. For example, what do we mean when we say God? Can a word really capture the meaning or essence of something or someone, let alone God?



Rudolf Otto

When we say we have a message from someone or a letter written from someone, the words we receive are not the entire message. I would argue the words are more like the envelope, which contains the real message inside. When unfolding the true message, we come across something mysterious. The words we use to communicate our ideas, intentions, and experience carry rational concepts and they are necessary and useful; however, it is important to recognize the depth of the reality which language attempts to convey. This is especially true concerning religious language, above all, the idea of God.

Otto's concern is a bias to the over-rationalization of religion. He says "The construction of dogma and doctrine has in general de-valued the non-rational element in the religious experience, leaving the *idea of God* one-sidedly intellectual and rationalistic. While maintaining that dogma and rational doctrine are absolutely necessary and is "a concern even for the wildest of mystics," he says it has not left enough room for the non-rational element in the religious experience, which is especially apparent in modern sciences and comparative studies of world religions. For example, just think of the way God is spoken about in philosophy versus the Psalms or the diary of St. Faustina.

For Otto, a true mystery is more than what is simply unknown about our nature or the world. Certain gaps in our understanding that can be filled by further study or experience are better classified as a "problem." For Otto, a true mystery is not only beyond our comprehension and beyond limit of knowledge but also in it "we come upon something wholly other." He calls it the *Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans*-the tremendous mystery which fascinates us.

In his book, *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith*, Bishop Robert Barron refers to Otto's *mysterium tendendum et fascinans* in his first chapter titled "Amazed and Afraid." He recounts how Jesus occasionally evoked a certain awe and fear in his disciples, reminiscent of the 'fear of the Lord' described in the Old Testament encounters with YAHWEH. To be clear, it is not so much a fear like when in danger, but more so a sublime reverence for something much greater than ourselves. We simultaneously recognize our smallness before His greatness. Fear of the Lord is an awareness of the magnificence and majesty of God. We see examples of this holy fear in Moses at the burning bush, Mary at the Annunciation, and Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration on Mt. Tabor. Fear of the Lord is taught by the Church to be a gift of the Holy Spirit. (It is also known as *Wonder and Awe*.) ***Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*** (*Proverbs 9:10*)

Otto, likewise, describes a particular kind of awareness or response to being in the presence of the sacred or Holy. He calls it "feeling the numinous." While his discussion of *feeling* may be overlooked as something simply subjective, Otto emphasizes that it is a feeling "of something" objective and distinct from oneself, and very particular to being in the presence of the *Numen*, a word that loosely translates to divinity. Again, it translates loosely because Otto says the non-rational or super-rational in the religious sense is something we experience without the ability to give a clear conceptual expression.

Now, think back to a moment of a deeply felt religious experience, a moment of worship or some encounter. It may contain familiar feelings such as gratitude, trust, love, dependence, but what Otto says makes it truly distinguishable from other familiar experiences is that numinous element which,



THE ROLE OF MYSTERY

for the most part cannot be described but can, for lack of a better word be “felt.” *Feeling* is still a limited and inadequate description, but Otto commits to this word as a practical analogy. There is nothing else like it. An encounter with God is beyond the words and concepts, and feelings we used to describe or reflect on in our experience. We experience familiar “feelings” in association with the numinous, because we are human and thus any experience involves the whole person, including the imagination, intellect, and memories, but he emphasizes that the uniqueness of our religious experience is that which transcends these concepts and feelings and leaves us with a certain stupor before something immeasurably great and mysterious.

In April 1994 NASA astronaut Dr. Thomas D. Jones had the opportunity to receive Holy Communion while flying in the space shuttle, Endeavor. He recounts the experience in his book *Sky Walking: An Astronaut’s Memoir*:

As we meditated quietly in the darkened cockpit, a dazzling white light burst through space and into the cabin. Pure radiance from the risen sun streamed through Endeavour’s forward cockpit windows and bathed us in its warmth. What else could this be but a sign? — God’s gentle affirmation of our union with Him. Drifting parallel to the floor, I rolled away from my crewmates, embarrassed at my reaction to that singular sunrise. Through tears I looked instead through the overhead windows at the Pacific below, the dawn painting its surface with a rich, limitless blue.

Dr. Jones later commented, “We are designed to be awed in space. If our imperfect species has found such glimmers of delight in our first tentative encounter with the cosmos, then we have truly found a most caring and generous God.” Like Dr. Jones and the disciples who walked with Jesus and were amazed with the fear of the Lord, we get a sense from time to time of the magnificence of God in our life.

I haven’t had the chance, yet, to receive communion in space, but I did have a relatable experience while flying on a plane. In the spring of 2019, I had the chance to visit the Grand Canyon with my family. I’ll never forget standing on the southern rim looking across the gigantic fissure to the tree line on the other side of the canyon, which looked like specks of dirt on humongous window sill. I have never felt so small; but what really struck me about this particular trip, was the flight from Ft. Lauderdale to Arizona three days prior. Our plane took off shortly after sunset. We were already at cruising altitude when the color of the night sky deepened from a navy blue to black and all the stars began to reveal themselves in layers as I gazed through my window. From 35,000 feet in the air, you don’t have to look up to see the stars. They are right there parallel with your vision. Below, I could see many cities like tiny yellow spider-webs scattered across the earth’s dark surface. There were also several thunder storms passing over the cities, which on the ground always flaunt their power, but now looked like little flickering bubbles of white light.



Seeing the sky that night, the cities and storms below, and reflecting on my place in relation to it all, was fascinating. I was in awe, and also more than a little uncomfortable. Eventually I moved past that feeling of “I shouldn’t be up here,” and meditated on the contrast between the enormity and vastness of the space with the fragility and intricacy of the cities below. Then came a sense of profound peace and wonder at the thought of the Creator ultimately responsible for all of this.

I have had many conversations with people about their belief in God in recent years, and almost all of them involved the telling of an encounter or experience; sometimes distinct moments and other times a sequence of events that seemed orchestrated by a divine hand. These encounters tell us of something of God’s nature as mysterious, but also as personal and captivating. A person is someone I can relate to, being myself a person. Yet, what is a person but a mystery? Can I ever fully know myself or another? We know ourselves to a certain extent, but there is always more we discover each day of our existence. In a way, we are always in the process of knowing ourselves and other persons, even family and friends who we have claimed to know our whole lives. The same applies to our relationship with God.

We have heard many times, we are called and invited into a relationship with God. Any good relationship involves experiencing and enjoying the presence of the other. In this case, it is a relationship with a Divine other. Fr. Matias shared with us during a Sunday homily an excerpt from St. Francis de Sales on mystical theology. De Sales encourages Christians to share every moment of our life with God, not keeping anything to ourselves but entering into constant dialogue as “heart speaks to heart.” The English translator of *The Idea of the Holy*, John W. Harvey, wrote:

In his later chapters [Otto] makes it clear that for him the supremacy of Christianity over all other religions lies in the unique degree in which the numinous elements, such as the sense of awe and reverence before infinite mystery and infinite majesty, are yet combined and made one with the rational elements, assuring us that God is an all-righteous, all-provident, and all-loving Person, with whom a man may enter into the most intimate relationship. (next slide)

God is beyond our human nature and concepts of Him, but is still personal, and thus, being persons ourselves, we are able to communicate with Him in the deepest of ways. I believe this is what is at the heart of prayer. In this life, we are in a continuous process of knowledge and growth toward our ultimate purpose, namely, union with God and

each other. In this process we come to know ourselves and God through prayer. St. John Vianney says, “In this intimate union, God and the soul are fused together like two bits of wax that no one can pull apart. Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes down upon us.”

Faith & Reason

Otto goes at length in *The Idea of the Holy* about the non-rational element in the religious experience, but far from denying the value of rationality in religion, Otto also highlights the importance of the rational concepts we use to describe our faith. We commonly see words like “spirit, splendor, glory, majesty, supreme power” associated with God in many religions. As far as they can be defined and conceptualized, these are rational attributes, and these are good and necessary. Otto even boasts Christianity has a unique abundance and clarity on concepts of God though Revelation. So despite the intense focus on the non-rational elements of religion in *The Idea of the Holy*, it is evident that Otto held a position in support of faith and reason and reason-in-faith, which all Catholics have been encouraged to adopt. The Holy in Otto's terms has aspects of the rational and non-rational which are essentially “united like the woof and warp of a fabric.” John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* discusses the relationship between faith and reason, addressing the difference between the two, but highlighting their compatibility and inseparability.

So how does mystery interact with faith and reason? Well, not only are they related, but I would argue that mystery is the foundation and principal condition for our faith and reason. It is the mystery of reality, of being, with God as its source, which provokes our wonder and leads to inquiry and developments in rational and philosophical thought. It is the mystery of God, the center of our faith, whose face we are constantly seeking, that provides us with meaning, purpose, origin, and destination.

The Mystery of the Real Presence in the Eucharist

St. Thomas Aquinas, who was responsible for a majority of the most profound, articulate, and beautifully organized commentary on the doctrines of the Catholic faith and wrote thousands of pages of carefully articulated theology and philosophy, said after a mystical vision, “In light of what I have seen, all I’ve written is but straw”. What was it? What did he see? Apparently, something ineffable, something on which silence must be kept. Any more description would not have done it justice. On the other hand, we also read that Jesus Himself affirmed his works and specific calling, saying to him, “You have written well of me, Thomas. What reward will you receive for your labor?”. He replied, of course, “Domine, non nisi Te” - ***Nothing except You, Lord.***





THE ROLE OF MYSTERY

The Catholic Church encourages the faithful with faith and reason to understand the sacraments and their central value in our lives, especially the Eucharist, which has been called the source and summit of the Christian life. When speaking about the sacrament of the Eucharist, we are speaking about a mystery. It is the mystery of the presence...the Real Presence of God Himself contained in the consecrated host. In the *Summa Theologiae* (III, q. 75) St. Thomas Aquinas describes the Eucharist as a "mystery in the strictest sense and hence can be apprehended but by faith, which rests upon divine authority." St. Thomas asks, "*Quid hoc Sacramento mirabilis?*" -What greater miracle can there be than this sacrament?" In *Lauda Sion* he writes, "Hear what Holy Church maintaineth, that the bread its substance changed into flesh, the wine to Blood. Doth it pass thy comprehension? Faith, the law of sight transcending, leaps to things not understood."

Thomas, however, never dismisses the importance of reason. On the contrary, he defends its purpose to "penetrate deeper into this great mystery by reflecting further

on the precise manner of the conversion of the eucharistic elements and to refute the disfiguring heresies." He describes transubstantiation using philosophical terms; God preserves the existence of the accidents while replacing the substance. Berger comments, "Thomas reflection is rational but illuminated by faith, proceeding profoundly and boldly, yet still like no other bows humbly before the supernatural mystery it encounters in the dogma of the church." In the development of the doctrine of transubstantiation, the Real Presence, we find a remarkable example of the harmony between faith and reason which helps us appreciate the mystery behind the words.

We are encouraged to do a "holy hour" every day in seminary, which is an hour dedicated to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. I believe I am deeply affected and changed by this time of prayer and contact with this mysterious Sacrament. It has become the most important hour of the day, setting the tone for all the rest. Still, it is possible in seminary to become somewhat desensitized to the environment, images, words, and sacred space



which we dwell in. Even the Mass can sometimes feel routine. However, this is only a concern if we remain at the surface. The Truth is transcendent as John Paul II reminds us. It goes deeper than concepts, farther than senses, and sometimes beyond comfort; and this is true also of relationships. No amount of time spent with loved ones is enough to ultimately satisfy our desire to be with them. Just as no amount of study, prayer, or time spent in one place can ever exhaust the mystery of a vocation to the priesthood, and that is because at the heart of it is a Person. Jesus is the Revelation of the mystery of God the Father, and His Spirit present deep within us calls us to intimate relationship with Him.

As I grew in my Catholic faith over the past seven years, I became more attracted to the idea of being a part of something bigger than myself. When I seriously started discerning what I perceived as a “call” to the priesthood, not only did it resonate with that desire to be a part of something bigger, but I realized this is as BIG as it gets. If what the Church teaches is true, and I believe it is, we come into contact with the author of life, the source of

all creation, the Almighty and eternal God every day in a most unique, profound, and even privileged way. How this all happens remains a mystery. The divinity of Jesus and the humanity of God is a mystery. The Eucharist is a mystery. Yet, we do have some access, some point of contact with that which is so far above us.

Mystery baffles us and at the same time forms our perspective of existence. It is the foundation of our reality, our reasoning, and our faith. It is a humbling encounter that fosters the experience of wonder and allows us to appreciate our world, ourselves, other people, and God more profoundly- and as if seeing for the first time, meeting for the first time, and yet embracing, and being embraced by an unfathomable mystery that is also familiar, so “close to home.” Albert Einstein is credited with saying, “There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle; the other is as though everything is a miracle.” Do we recognize the mystery and miracle of life that we participate in each day?



SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

DIVINE MERCY

Austin Smith

*Second-Year Philosophy
Diocese of St. Petersburg*



Hi! My name is Austin Smith. I was born and raised in the Tampa Bay Area and am a seminarian for the Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida!

Today, I will be talking about Divine Mercy and the thread it has woven through my life. The recent popularity of Divine Mercy was first spoken of by the 20th century mystic St. Faustina. Divine Mercy is God's loving mercy for sinners. The concept of Divine Mercy is nothing new, but is written throughout the Scriptures. God's message spoken through St. Faustina is unique in that it applies to our times: it is like Jesus is pointing a big sign to His heart and saying, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Jesus is asking us to come to his heart and receive the "unfathomable abyss" of His mercy.

MERCY IN MY LIFE

Growing up, my relationship with God was shallow: He was just another part of my life, and it is now clear that I had no deep concept of His “unfathomable mercy.” Divine Mercy had a plan for me though, and one summer after a very rough freshman year of high school, I had an encounter with God’s mercy that would change me forever.

It was the summer of 2014, and I had just had a less than successful first year of high school. I was not doing my best academically, athletically, or personally. The year culminated with a suspension, and I was assigned to clean and paint the ceiling of a basement. Additionally, I was struggling with my health which further exasperated the situation. I was feeling pretty far from my dreams at that point, and so I began to open my heart to God’s dream for my life.

A few weeks after my suspension, I went to a Catholic summer camp in the North Georgia mountains called Covecrest where I felt myself desiring to give all of my heart to the Lord. It was that week while in the atmosphere of Adoration of the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament that I had an experience of The Father’s tender love in the Sacrament of Confession. God revealed Himself to me in that Confession: that I am not defined by my weaknesses or sins, but that I am defined by His love and His mercy.

I fell in love with mercy that weekend, and I wanted more of it. As I was telling everyone about my experience of God, a chaperone from my home parish challenged me to do something about my mercy encounter. So I did. From that point on, I decided to go to Confession every week.

Thankfully once home, I stayed faithful to this commitment, and God’s loving mercy continued to change my heart over time. After years of this and growing a lot in my faith, I realized that I was still pretty weak. Yes, I could be a good Christian, but to be the person I was called to be, to be a Great Saint for the Lord seemed near impossible. Enter Divine Mercy.

Two years ago, Divine Mercy began to stalk me starting in a Polish adoration chapel in Lowell, Chicago, where I



picked up a copy of St Faustina’s diary. I was hooked from my first reading, and this message of love began to grow within me.

Soon Divine Mercy started following me everywhere, whether it was the priest from an order called the Fathers of Mercy who saved me from a heat stroke, or randomly receiving the gift of a painting of the Divine Mercy image from my parish priest, Jesus had some mission in portraying his mercy to me! I realized (or at least now realize) that God wanted to show me that I could be great for Him and others, but that it could only come through His mercy and not my own strength!

One of the books that helped me to understand this is 33 Days to Merciful Love by Father Michael Gaitley. In it, St Therese of Lisieux, another Saint of Mercy, describes herself as a little bird who can barely fly, yet who has the heart of an Eagle which desires greatness. She would wonder with her eagle heart at the great saints who were like eagles soaring above her, knowing that she did not have the strength to fly with them. Not daunted, she desired to surpass these great saints, yet Therese knew she could not do it on her own strength. Instead, the Little Flower asked God to lift her up in His tender mercy. She knew that Jesus could not dare to watch her fall again and again on the rough stairs of sanctity and not come to pick her up Himself. It is through this action of allowing Jesus to pick her up, and asking Jesus for the rejected graces of others who did not desire God’s mercy, that helped St Therese of Liseux to become the person who St Pope Paul X called, “the greatest saint of modern times.”

I feel called to be like Therese: to be a shining star of God’s mercy in the darkness of the modern world. I need not fear, but instead I must do my best and allow Jesus to pick me up. I must be bold in asking for the graces that others reject. I know God will do the rest.

This is just a bit of my Divine Mercy story; I cannot fathom what glory Jesus’ tender heart has planned for you!

WILL YOU DARE TO ALLOW JESUS TO MAKE YOU A GREAT SAINT?





Our Lady of Charity

Mother and Patroness of Cuba



ERICH VAZQUEZ

*First-Year Pre-Theology
Archdiocese of Miami*

Due to the influence of the Catholic Church in Latin America, many countries appreciate the apparitions of the Virgin Mary. One of the best examples of this is the Marian apparition on the Island of Cuba: Our Lady of Charity. In contemporary times, Cubans, whether believers or unbelievers, on the island and in exile, still honor the Image of Nuestra Señora del Cobre for their patriotic identification to the Cuban homeland. It is the image of the Virgin that gives hope to the exiled Cubans and gives perseverance to the Cubans who are on the Island. In addition to a political identity, 'La Imagen' gives Cubans an existential identity because the Image is a memory of another heavenly world of peace and love compared to this world of hatred and violence. For these reasons and more, we will explore the origins of 'La Imagen de la Virgen' through the historical context including the contemporary reaction of the Cuban episcopate.

Before we begin it is important to clarify that I am aware that the mystical phenomenon that occurred in the Bay of Nipe with the three ranchers in the seventeenth century was more of a find than a mystical apparition of the Virgin, as opposed to the appearance of La Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico to San Juan Diego. In a spiritual sense, though, the finding that occurred in Cuba was an apparition of Our Lady because the purpose of an apparition is to remind us of that hidden celestial world from our daily experience. In addition, the effects that the discovery had on the Cuban people are similar to the effects the apparition of Guadalupe had on the Mexican people. Thus, in this article the words "appearance" and "finding" will be used interchangeably when describing the spiritual occurrence of Our Lady of Charity.

The popular story of the appearance of Our Lady of Charity is that three men, called the Three Johns, were sailing on a boat during a storm. After the storm passed by, the men saw a doll floating on the water with the inscription, "I am the Virgin of Charity." The miracle was the fact that the doll image was completely dry when it was collected from the sea. Inspired, the three men presented the image to the people of the village where they built the Sanctuary that



still stands today. The general theme of this popular history is true, but there is a lack of historical details that will help as we seek to further understand the significance of the image in the socio-economic and political context of Cuba in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

During this time, Cuba was undergoing Spanish colonization of the island in which the government, through its military might, conquered and exploited the natives of the island and the African slaves brought to work in the mines of the island. One of these mines was near Santiago de Cuba where in 1599, the Artillery Captain, Don Francisco Sánchez de Moya, was in charge of maintaining them. This detail is important because according to the historian priest Monsignor Ramón Polcari, Sanchez de Moya in 1609 permitted a hermitage dedicated to Our Lady of Guide, Mother of God that came from Illescas, Spain. In the hermitage, African and native slaves encountered the Catholic Faith and received catechism from the cleric who was guarding the small church.

It was during this time that the discovery occurred and that the veneration of La Imagen became popular. There are historical records of the events of the apparition, beginning with three stories written by the first, seventh, and ninth Chaplains of the Sanctuary where the Image was and still is today. But the most interesting historical evidence is from



My sister, Maria Teresa Vazquez, and I in front of the replica of The Image of Our Lady of Charity

the interview that civil officers and clerics did with Juan Moreno, one of the three ranchers that found the Image.

Moreno describes how after the find, they brought La Imagen to the altar of the local parish by orders of Sanchez de Moya, the Mine Manager. Moreno continues the story, describing miracles that occurred with La Imagen. For example, there was one moment when La Imagen disappeared at night and, in the morning, was at the altar once again with her clothing wet. The construction of the Shrine was another miracle and supernatural phenomenon. When they were researching where to build the new sanctuary, they saw three lights on the Cerro de la Mina and decided it was on that very spot that they would build the Sanctuary.

With this interview and with the stories written by the Chaplains of the Sanctuary, we can speculate that the finding of La Imagen occurred in 1612. Enough historical evidence is also present to sufficiently give credibility to the finding of Our Lady.

To dive deeper into the historical context, one needs to look at the Cuban episcopate during this time. The Bishop of the entire island was Alon-

so Toledo de Almenares. He was described as a helpful Bishop to the people due to his three tours around the island. He was also able to bring recognition for Cuba to the Church of Latin America with his participation in the Provincial Synod of Santo Domingo, which also included Venezuela and Puerto Rico. In his account of Cuba's history, Monsignor Suarez makes no connection between the growth of devotion to the Image, the construction of the Sanctuary, and the activities of Bishop Toledo de Almenares. But one can assume that the Bishop, on one of his trips around the island, visited La Imagen in La Mina del Cobre while they were building the Sanctuary.

To summarize, the historical context around the discovery of Our Lady involves: Spanish colonization, Catholic evangelization, a sociological restructuring with the integration of different populations and the economic gains of Spain in the mines of Cuba through slavery. In this human context, full of virtue and sin, came The Image of the Virgin who is still touching Cuban hearts on the Island and in Exile.

However, although we understand the historical context of the apparition, there is still a historical objection that the Virgin of Charity is simply the Image of Illescas of Spain that Sánchez de Moya brought when he was in charge of La Mina del Cobre. This objection was raised by the historian and researcher Irene Aloha Wrigth (1872-1972). The counter-objection would be that the evidence that Wrigth used for her argument was not dated until 1660 and the documentation of Juan Moreno's interview was 1687. This omission of curial evidence shows that the objection does not serve against the credibility of the apparition of Our Lady. At last, it is in faith, even if it is a primitive faith, that the Cuban people approach the Image of Our Lady of Charity.

The impact that Our Lady of Charity has had during contemporary times still resonates with the people of Cuba. This is evident in that every year on the eighth of September, there is a large celebration in the parishes of Havana and Santiago de Cuba where the Sanctuary remains to this day.

Furthermore, at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century, the leader of the Catholic Church in Cuba, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, wrote these words in reference to the title of La Virgen del Cobre:

"With that title, God wanted to give everything to all our people, as patron and protector, to the Mother of his Son. 'I am the Virgin of Charity' read in the table on which It floated in the bay of Nipe, the image revered to this day by millions of Cubans on its altar of El Cobre," (Emphasis placed by the author).

In addition, in the Cuba Diaspora of South Florida there is a large celebration done by the Archdiocese of Miami where the local people gather at the University of Miami Arena to celebrate Holy Mass on the feast day of Our Lady of Charity. In Miami there is a replica of The Original Image and its Sanctuary in National Shrine of La Virgen de la Caridad that was built under the direction of Monsignor Agustín Román, the former Auxiliary Bishop of Miami. This National Shrine has been an oasis for Cuban exiles. It is where they find hope and are

comforted after the tragedy of leaving their families and their patriotic homeland due to the oppressive communist regime. When the Cardinal, Archbishop of Havana, Jaime Ortega, visited the National Shrine in Miami, he said these words during his homily expressing the suffering of the exiled Cuban:

"This shrine is attended by Cubans who come to these lands, so too can she tell the story of the Cuban people on this side of the sea...! How many testimonies of the heart the Virgin of Charity gathers here from those who prayed gratefully to their plants for arriving!"

From colonial time to contemporary times, The Image of Our Lady of Charity will always be the guide to Faith, Hope and Love for the Cuban People.







SEMINARIAN SPOTLIGHT

TRUST IN GOD

RICKINSON BANTOU

*Third-Year, Philosophy
Archdiocese of Miami*



The Bible guides Christians to have confidence in God. It is the basis for the development of the whole Christian life. “Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh and whose faith Yahweh is. It looks like a tree planted at the edge of the water, which stretches its roots towards the current; it does not fear anything when the heat arrives, its foliage remains green; in a year of drought it is without anxiety and does not cease to bear fruit” (Jeremiah 17: 1-8). This is the main reason why we must trust God. By trusting God our lives are transformed. He is trustworthy and faithful, unlike us humans who are not always faithful and trustworthy. God never lies, and He always keeps his promises. We can’t trust some-

one we do not know. Therefore, God tells us and reveals to us who He is. If we seek to know God through the Word, we will find that He is trustworthy and our faith in Him will grow daily. This has been a guiding principle in my life and vocational journey.

Furthermore, God says to us, “Whoever puts his trust in me, I will bless him.” He gives us life. “It is you who formed my back, who knit me together in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13). My beloved, the love of God is infinite. He tells us who He is in His son. We should learn to trust Him by seeing how trustworthy He has been in our lives. For He gives rest, “Blessed be Yahweh,” as the Scriptures say, “who gave rest to His people Israel, according to all His promises; of all the good words He spoke through the ministry of His servant Moses, none failed” (1 Kings 8:56). The record of God’s promises and His fulfillment of them are found in the Scriptures for all to see. In addition, Church documents echo the Scriptures by affirming the love and faithfulness of God for His people. We can personally bear witness to God’s faithfulness in our lives and how He keeps His promises to save us, use us to accomplish His purposes, and fill us with a peace that surpasses all understanding as we embark on His course planned for us. The more we experience His love, kindness, and loyalty, the more we will trust Him.

My friends, in this time all have converged; let us surrender ourselves to the Lord and rest in His tender open arms to welcome us. Let us learn to pour out our hearts to Him. “Do not be afraid because I have conquered the world” (John 16: 33). He offers us His love; let us rest in His gentle presence. Let’s not forget

that our relationship with God is the most important relationship in our life because whoever knows the Father will know himself and will be able to really live.

To know the Father, you must go through the Son. “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.” Because of this to have confidence in God, you must learn to know the Son. He told us, “I am in the Father and the Father is in Me” (John 14: 11). We must understand that He is “merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in kindness” (Psalm 103:8). In the sacraments He grants us His grace, and precisely in the sacrament of the Eucharist, He gives His Body and Blood as food and drink. Christ reveals to us the Father’s compassion for us who are His children because He knows what we are formed from, and He remembers that we are sinners. We need to trust Him, especially when we are going through hardships. He assured us by saying, “I will be with you until the end of time” (Matthew 28:20). God does not abandon us; trust Him in all circumstances because He promises life in abundance.

My friends then, let us be grateful to God, for what He has given us so that we may have confidence in Him. He entrusts everything to us, we who are weak. He does not hesitate to empty His greatness or His strength so that He may give Himself up to and for us.



WHAT LED YOU TO THE SEMINARY?

SAINT-Clos PAPOULOUTE

Archdiocese of Miami

WILLIAM CONTREAS

Diocese of Las Cruces, New Mexico



Having come from Haiti, I am the oldest in a family of five children; I have three brothers and one sister. All of us are still alive and are practicing the Catholic faith. I had the grace of having been educated in Christian values. My first experience of love was in my family. My parents were not perfect, but they loved me with all their hearts. This love that I received created in me a desire to love others. Growing up, I learned that it is not easy to love. I look at my parents; I see how they forget themselves out of love for us. So, I gradually realized, seeing the faith of my parents and the people in my Parish, this love is the presence of God in us. This helped me to develop more respect for each person, the fear of God, and prayer life.

As a child, there was not a parish close to where I lived in the countryside. So, to go to Mass, we had to walk several kilometers. But at twelve years old, when I was in seventh grade, I moved from the countryside to the city to continue going to high school. Every Sunday, I went to Mass, and I began to build friendships with those in the Church. Some of these friends invited me to visit their home for fellowship. It was in our conversations that I came to recognize that man has many spiritual, social, moral, and intellectual dimensions. Just as a plant needs water every day for its growth, so man needs prayer to sustain his spiritual life to connect us to God every day and to enrich our spiritual life.

When I moved to the city, in the parish group I joined, I learned to strengthen my faith and to love the Church in her diversity. What I find amazing in our life as believers is that the Lord is always able to go and seek us wherever we are, to make us His disciples. I had not thought about the priesthood before. My dream was to be an engineer because I loved mathematics and science when I was in high school. Some years later, I switched focuses when I felt called to be a teacher. After three years of study to become a teacher, I became aware of the beauty and the greatness of the love God has for us. I perceived the greatness and the nobility of the mission which would consist in announcing this love as a love greater than myself since it comes from God. I feel in the depth of my heart this mission is for me also, and I want to dedicate all my life, my energy, my strength, my time, and all my being to God through the Church to accompany the people of God to the way of salvation.

Today, I am very happy and praise the Lord for having granted me the grace to live my vocation inside the Archdiocese of Miami. During my experience at Saint John Vianney College Seminary, accompanied by my spiritual director, my academic advisor, and all my brothers here, I realize that no one is too far from God. He always puts someone who has faith on our path to help each of us to better discern our own vocation. By participating in some activities in my parish, I discovered a sense of service that inspired me. This allowed me to fully understand that it would be a good decision to give my life to the Lord in service of the proclamation of the Gospel.

I can say the simplicity of the priest in my parish whom I developed a good relationship with strengthened my vocation. This allowed me to really enjoy the energy of groups and different Christian movements that I experienced in my native parish. I lead several groups in my parish. The presence of these people committed to their faith gave me motivation in my own vocation. It is truly a great grace for me to be able to respond to the Lord's call by asking to enter to the Archdiocese of Miami. You can already imagine the joy of this journey of faith that has brought me to this day to continue responding to God's call.

During my process of formation at Saint John Vianney College Seminary, I discovered and enjoyed community life more. Doing a life review and seeing my journey of faith will soon take me to another step to continue responding to the call of the Lord. Through my experience at the Saint John Vianney seminary, I can say there is nothing more beautiful than to give my life in the service of Christ and of His people. If you feel that the Lord is calling you, do not be afraid. It is for your greatest good and happiness. He is still calling today. You have to be patient with your discernment, be well accompanied, and you will be able to respond to Love by giving the gift of yourself. I will keep all of you who are reading my vocation story in my prayers so that you may discover the God's will for you and that he gives you the strength to respond to your call, that of the vocation you have, whatever it is. You will taste His joy.



SAINT-CLOS PAPOULOUTE

*Fourth-Year Philosophy
Archdiocese of Miami*





WILLIAM CONTREAS

*Third-Year, Philosophy
Diocese of Las Cruces*



My vocation story begins when I was a young boy walking out of Sunday Mass and was told by the priest that the parish needed altar servers. Without hesitating, I volunteered to help. This headless volunteering surprised me more than it surprised the priest. Normally I would never commit to anything without thorough consideration. Leading up to this moment I had only felt a subtle inclination toward being involved in the liturgy and the priesthood. I remember the thought of being a priest entering my head one Sunday, but I immediately dismissed it because I did not like the particular priest who was celebrating Mass that day. Little did I know that these quiet movements of my heart were nudges from the Lord preparing me to accept my pastor's invitation to be an altar server and grow closer to Him through the liturgy. When I heard of the need for altar servers, the only thing I wanted to do was answer the call to serve. This event set the precedent for the rest of my vocational journey because, contrary to my cautious nature, it took me out of my comfort zone and into the midst of service.

After going through a time of turmoil during my teenage years, I finally resolved to pursue the priesthood. I selected a seminary and attended the introductory retreat. Mercifully I was not accepted at this first attempt at pursuing the priesthood. By the end of the retreat, I was sent home due to homesickness and insufficient life experience. I was then counseled by my spiritual director to get a job working at a dry cleaning shop and begin the process of applying to my local diocese first. After two years of dialogue and discernment, I was formally accepted as a seminarian, and my journey in seminary began.

Oddly enough, St. John Vianney College Seminary is not the first seminary I have attended. I was first

sent to Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas. Making the transition to seminary presented its own challenges, but by the grace of God I persevered. Sadly, the college program in San Antonio was suffering due to a lack of enrollment so it was decided that I would be transferred to Mt. Angel Seminary in Oregon the following year. Mt. Angel was able to provide a much larger community to grow and learn with as my journey continued. Just as I was settling into my new surroundings, I was finally transferred here to St. John Vianney in Miami for my third year of seminary in order to learn Spanish. This was an important decision because being from New Mexico much of the pastoral work needs to be done bilingually.

It is easy to speak about my journey so far in a few sentences, but living each one of these lines has been a life changing experience. At every turn I had to fight the urge to do what I thought was best and listen to the Lord, still gently nudging my heart just as He had done in the beginning. My first year in seminary was not an easy one; there were joys and sorrows, triumphs and mistakes. Every time I was transferred it was a heart wrenching experience to bid farewell to friends and familiar surroundings. As my experience and knowledge increased, it seemed my faith and trust were decreasing. At the beginning of each year at a new seminary I wanted nothing more than to give into the pain and confusion. I could not understand why my journey needed to be so different from other seminarians who spend four years at a single seminary. Each time, however, I harkened back to that day when I let my spontaneity follow the Lord's nudging to become an altar server and remember that it is not about understanding. It is about serving with perseverance, following no matter where the road leads, and loving something bigger than myself.



PHOTO: CALIB MALEC / ST. JOHN VIANNEY COLLEGE SEMINARY

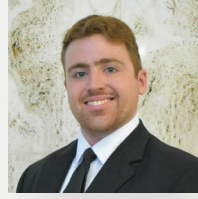
During Lent, the community takes part in outdoor Stations of the Cross. This year, due to the ongoing pandemic, we spent all of Holy Week together on campus. This unique opportunity allowed us to create an outdoor Stations of the Cross that spanned all of our campus.

SEMINARIANS

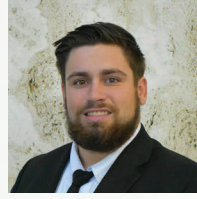
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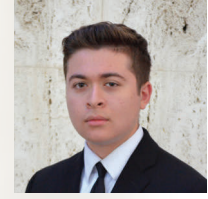
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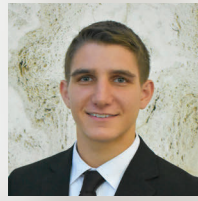
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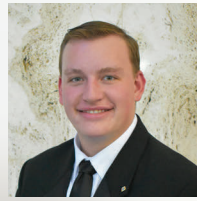
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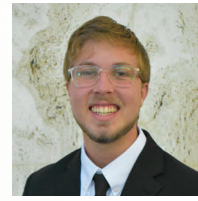
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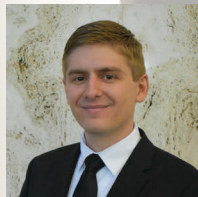


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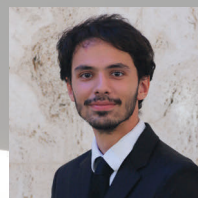
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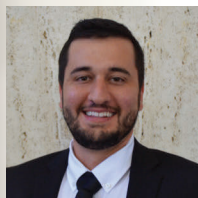


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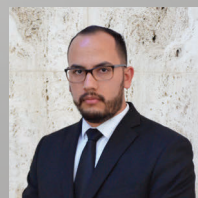
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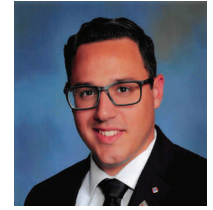
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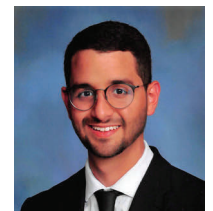
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"*W*HOEVER LOVES HIS BROTHER REMAINS IN THE LIGHT, AND THERE IS NOTHING IN HIM TO CAUSE A FALL."
(1 JOHN 2:10)

PLEASE CONTINUE TO PRAY FOR OUR STEADFAST FAITH IN JESUS, BEING STRENGTHENED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH OUR FRATERNITIES.

"*F*OR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM."
(MATTHEW 18:20)



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ERICH VAZQUEZ

Pre-Teología de Primer Año
Arquidiócesis de Miami

"Yo soy el Camino, la Verdad, y la Vida. Nadie viene al Padre sino por mí". (Juan 14: 6)

La historia de mi vocación es un pequeño eco de esta poderosa revelación que Nuestro Señor les dio a Sus Apóstoles durante la Última Cena antes de que completara su obra salvífica a través de Su muerte y resurrección. Lo que me sorprende particularmente de este versículo es la identificación que Jesús hace con la 'Verdad'.

Al venir de una familia de inmigrantes cubanos que huyeron de un régimen ateo, mi familia entendió lo que era tener una fe católica fuerte frente a una sociedad que era hostil a esa misma fe. Mi familia también entendió la importancia de la educación de una manera doble, el primero era para avanzar profesionalmente en este país y segundo, lo que es más importante, es para convertirse en una persona mejor. Fueron estas dos ideas las que proporcionarían las semillas que luego crecerían para convertirse en mi vocación.



Habiendo ido a escuelas seculares toda mi vida, conocí y me hice amigo de personas de diversos orígenes que tenían diferentes credos y personas sin credos, pero haber ido y estudiado en Doral Academy, una escuela secundaria preparatoria para la universidad, estos amigos y los conocidos también eran muy inteligentes y con un prestigio académico excepcional. Aunque éramos jóvenes, mis amigos y yo teníamos conversaciones intelectualmente maduras sobre casi cualquier cosa, desde política hasta economía, física y matemáticas. Sin embargo, lo que más me preocupaba eran las cuestiones fundamentales como las relativas a Dios, el alma, el conocimiento, es decir, me preocupaban las cuestiones filosóficas y yo quería buenas respuestas a estas preguntas, respuestas que llevaran a conocer la 'Verdad' y nada más. .

Al mismo tiempo, me involucré en trabajo apologetico en la que intente defender la Fe de las objeciones de protestantes y ateos por igual. Por la gracia de Dios, un maestro llamado Sr. Muñoz había formado un club de filosofía y pronto comenzó a ofrecer clases de filosofía. Tomé su clase en mi último año en la escuela secundaria y esto me cambió la vida. La formación filosófica que recibí fue magnífica y gracias a esa formación pude solidificar intelectualmente mi fe católica y me inspiró a seguir estudiando filosofía

en la universidad. Tenía la opción de asistir a una universidad católica, pero como estaba dispuesto a probar la validez de las enseñanzas de la Iglesia Católica por el bien de la "Verdad" asistí a un colegio secular y luego a una universidad secular. Doy gracias a Dios por haber ido a Miami-Dade College y Florida International University, donde profesores de mentalidad secular me desafiaron a profundizar aún más en la Fe y fue por esos desafíos que comencé a leer y comprender el Doctor Communis, el Doctor Común en St. Thomas Aquino. Fue entonces que entendí la obra de la Divina Providencia ya que mi parroquia es la parroquia de Santo Domingo y recibí todos mis sacramentos de los sacerdotes de la Orden de Predicadores, de la cual la misma Orden de la que Aquino era parte. Santo Tomás y la tradición filosófica escolástica que lo siguió después proporcionaron claridad sobre la "Verdad" que es Jesucristo y Su Iglesia.

Cuanto más descubría la Verdad de la Fe, más me enamoraba de la Belleza de la Fe que me impulsaba a hacer el Bien en nombre de la Fe. Por esa razón, participé en el trabajo del pastoral juvenil a través de mis años en la escuela

secundaria y la universidad. Dichos Ministerios fueron Encuentros Juveniles, Encuentros Familiares, S.W.A.G. de la parroquia de Good Shepherd, y Juan 3:16 de mi propia parroquia. Específicamente, trabajar en retiros me permitió apreciar el trabajo de los sacerdotes, especialmente cuando la gente venían por el Sacramento de la Reconciliación. También fui maestro de catecismo y me di cuenta de que disfruto enseñar y catequizar. Además, había sido monaguillo cuando era adolescente. Al darme cuenta de que disfrutaba de la liturgia, el ministerio, la catequesis y la dinámica de la Iglesia en Miami, no temía el llamado del Señor a ser sacerdote para la Arquidiócesis de Miami.

El llamamiento al sacerdocio se produjo antes de que yo asistiera a la universidad. Sin embargo, lo puse a un lado pidiéndole al Señor que terminara la universidad y luego discerniera Su voluntad. En Su amor misericordioso eso es lo que sucedió y poco después entré en el seminario como seminarista de la Arquidiócesis de Miami. Doy gracias a Dios Todopoderoso por mi vocación junto a mi familiares y amigos que han contribuido a su realización. Fue la Verdad lo que me llevó al corazón de la Iglesia y al corazón de mi vocación y la Verdad no solo es una cosa para conocer, sino es la Persona debemos vivir en Cristo Jesús.







San José: Nuestro Mentor y Modelo a Seguir

Obispo Felipe J. Estévez

Obispo de la Diócesis de San Agustín

La receptividad del pueblo de Dios al Año de San José me ha sorprendido de verdad. Aunque San Marcos, San Juan y San Pablo se limitaran a mencionarlo, su importancia en los inicios del misterio de la salvación, su testimonio único como casto esposo de la Santísima Virgen María, mentor y tutor de Jesús, también como cabeza de la Sagrada Familia de Nazaret, ha sido mejor entendido y, por tanto, más apreciado. De alguna manera, en esta terrible pandemia mundial, San José es visto como un faro de luz.

Este breve artículo busca explorar cómo San José puede ser un mentor para nosotros: sacerdotes y seminaristas. Su historia se parece al nuestro en más de un sentido. José era un hombre común que se enamoró de la joven María, con quien esperaba casarse y tener hijos. Es así que el misterio se abrió paso. Los planes de Dios, a menudo, no son los nuestros, por lo que José tuvo que luchar, orar, purificar sus intenciones y escuchar la Palabra del Ángel anónimo: "José, hijo de David, no temas recibir a María tu mujer" (Mt 1, 20). La implicación de este llamado fue una renuncia al matrimonio para abrazar el celibato y la paternidad, y así colaborar en los misteriosos planes de Dios.

Todo sacerdote y seminarista saben que aceptar una llamada para los propósitos de Dios requiere de profundas luchas internas, dudas religiosas -a veces-, una necesidad de lidiar a través de contradicciones lógicas y purificación de legítimas aspiraciones afectivas masculinas, porque todos sabemos que nuestro eros necesita una purificación real para pasar al ágape célibe. No se puede leer el episodio del compromiso serio de José con María y la interrupción que Dios causó en sus planes sin darse cuenta de la lucha personal de su discipulado. El padre Simeon Leiva Merikakis escribe: "José tuvo que luchar y luego triunfar, mediante la fe y la confianza, sobre la confusión y el sufrimiento que le causó el difícil misterio de su paternidad. No puede resolver este misterio mediante la lógica humana o las tradiciones judías; solo puede, no 'resolverlo', sino acogerlo con fe en la revelación que Dios le hizo a través del sueño y el discurso del ángel."

Todo sacerdote y seminarista se encuentra en un proceso continuo de integración de su hombría, a lo largo de su vida. En el libro que edité, *Spiritual Husbands-Spiritual Fathers*, (Esposos espirituales-Padres espirituales), Mons. John Cihak ve que esta integración involucra los

roles de hijo, hermano, esposo y padre. Ser auténtico en cada una de estas dimensiones implica sanar nuestro "quebrantamiento relacional," en vista de ordenar a nuestros eros a una vida de ágape célibe, tan bien explicado por el Papa Benedicto en *Deus Caritas Est*, 3-18. El Papa Francisco eligió la dimensión del padre como un prisma para presentar la relevancia de San José en esta época, en su reciente carta apostólica *Patris Corde*, publicada durante la pandemia -el 8 de diciembre de 2020- "para aumentar nuestro amor por este gran santo, para animarnos a implorar su intercesión e imitar sus virtudes y su celo." Aquí hay una síntesis de sus puntos principales:

San José fue un padre tierno y amoroso. Para que nuestra paternidad refleje un amor tierno, debemos reconocer nuestras debilidades, no como obstáculos, sino aceptarlas con tierna misericordia. José experimentó temores, pero creyó "que Dios puede obrar incluso a través de nuestros miedos, nuestras fragilidades y nuestras debilidades. También nos enseña que, en medio de las tempestades de la vida, nunca debemos tener miedo de dejar que el Señor dirija nuestro rumbo. A veces queremos tener el control total, pero Dios siempre ve el panorama más amplio."

José fue un padre obediente. "En cada situación, José declaró su propio 'fiat', como los de María en la Anunciación y Jesús en el Huerto de Getsemani."

José fue un padre receptivo. "No está resignado pasivamente, sino con valentía y firmeza, proactivo. En nuestras propias vidas, la aceptación y la acogida pueden ser una expresión del don de fortaleza del Espíritu Santo. Solo el Señor puede darnos la fuerza necesaria para aceptar la vida tal como es, con todas sus contradicciones, frustraciones y desilusiones."

José fue un padre valiente. "De San José debemos aprender a amar al niño y a su madre, amar los sacramentos y la caridad, amar a la Iglesia y a los pobres. Cada una de estas realidades es siempre el niño y su madre."

José era un padre trabajador. "De él aprendió Jesús el valor, la dignidad y la alegría de lo que significa comer pan que es fruto del propio trabajo."

José fue un padre en las sombras. "Los padres no nacen, sino que se hacen. Un hombre no se convierte en padre

San José: Nuestro Mentor y Modelo a Seguir

simplemente por traer un hijo al mundo, sino asumiendo la responsabilidad de cuidar de ese hijo. Siempre que un hombre acepta la responsabilidad de la vida de otro, de alguna manera se convierte en el padre de esa persona ... José nunca se convirtió en el centro de las cosas. No pensó en sí mismo, sino que se centró en la vida de María y Jesús.”

Hay una rica iconografía sobre San José. La destacada meditación de la Patris Cordis del Papa Francisco constituye un modelo muy atractivo para un pastor de almas floreciendo en su caridad pastoral como padre y esposo de la comunidad parroquial.

¿Cómo reconocemos nuestro crecimiento constante en Jesús como el hombre nuevo? Ir con frecuencia a San José es la forma más efectiva. Se le conoce como un hombre silencioso, porque fue un hombre de rica vida interior, un contemplativo. También fue un hombre de determinación y acción. Inmediatamente después de experimentar los

movimientos de Dios dentro de su corazón, actuó como heredero del rey David, llevando a María a Belén para que el Hijo heredara las promesas dinásticas y mesiánicas. Con valentía, llevará a María y Jesús a Egipto como refugiados, debido a la persecución política.

Con el P. Jean-Jacques Olier, el gran promotor de sacerdotes y seminaristas en Francia, le pido a José: Bendito seas entre los hombres. Bienaventurados tus brazos que acariciaron el Verbo hecho carne. Bienaventurados tus brazos que han llevado a Aquel que mantiene todas las cosas en existencia. Bienaventurado tu pecho, en el que el Hijo de Dios reposó con cariño. Bendito tu corazón en llamas, con el amor más ardiente.

**VAYAMOS A SAN JOSÉ EN TODA NECESIDAD,
COMO NOS ADVIRTIÓ SANTA TERESA.**





OH SAN JOSÉ, CUYA PROTECCIÓN ES TAN GRANDE, TAN FUERTE, TAN PRONTA ANTE EL TRONO DE DIOS, PONGO EN TI TODOS MIS INTERESES Y DESEOS.

OH SAN JOSÉ, AYÚDAME CON TU PODEROSA INTERCESIÓN Y OBTÉN PARA MÍ TODAS LAS BENDICIONES ESPIRITUALES A TRAVÉS DE TU HIJO ADOPTIVO, JESUCRISTO NUESTRO SEÑOR, PARA QUE, HABIENDO OCUPADO AQUÍ ABAJO TU PODER CELESTIAL, PUEDA OFRECERTE MI ACCIÓN DE GRACIAS Y HOMENAJE.

OH SAN JOSÉ, NUNCA ME CANSO DE CONTEMPLARTE A TI Y A JESÚS DURMIENDO EN TUS BRAZOS. NO ME ATREVO A ACERCARME MIENTRAS ÉL REPOSA CERCA DE TU CORAZÓN. PRESIÓNALO EN MI NOMBRE Y BESA SU HERMOSA CABEZA POR MÍ, Y PÍDELE QUE ME DEVUELV A EL BESO CUANDO EXHALE MI ÚLTIMO ALIENTO.

SAN JOSÉ, PATRÓN DE LAS ALMAS QUE PARTEN, RUEGA POR MÍ.

AMÉN.



Nuestra Señora de La Caridad

Madre y Patrona, Reina de Cuba



ERICH VAZQUEZ

*Pre-Teología de Primer Año
Arquidiócesis de Miami*

Por la influencia que tuvo la Iglesia Católica en Latinoamérica muchos países aprecian las apariciones de la Virgen María. Unos de los mejores ejemplos es la aparición Mariana en la Isla de Cuba bajo la imagen de Nuestra Señora de La Caridad. Hoy en día, los cubanos, creyentes o no, en la Isla y en el Exilio, todavía honran la Imagen de Nuestra Señora del Cobre por la identificación que el cubano tiene en relación a su patrimonio. Es la Imagen de la Virgen que da esperanza al cubano exiliado y da perseverancia al cubano que está en la Isla. Además de una identidad política, la Virgen le da al cubano una identidad existencial porque ella es un recuerdo de otro mundo celestial de paz y amor a lo opuesto de este mundo de odio y violencia. Por estas razones y más vamos a explorar los orígenes de La Imagen de la Virgen a través del contexto histórico incluyendo la reacción contemporánea del episcopal cubano.

Antes de comenzar es importante clarificar que yo tengo conocimiento que el fenómeno místico que ocurrió en la bahía de Nipe con los tres rancheros en el siglo XVII era más un hallazgo que una aparición mística de la Virgen, contrario a lo que ocurrió con la aparición de La Virgen de Guadalupe en México a San Juan Diego. Pero en un sentido espiritual, el hallazgo que ocurrió era una aparición de La Virgen, debido a que el propósito de una aparición es para recordarnos que ese mundo celestial escondido de nuestra experiencia diaria; además del impacto que tenía el hallazgo al Pueblo Cubano, era como si habrá sido una aparición mística y personal como la de Guadalupe. Entonces en este artículo las palabras ‘aparición’ y ‘hallazgo’ se va usar intercambiamente cuando está describiendo el evento espiritual de Nuestra Señora de La Caridad del Cobre.

La historia popular de la aparición de Nuestra Señora de La Caridad es que tres hombres, llamados los Tres Juanes, estaban junto en un bote durante una tormenta cuando se calmó y flotando en el agua estaba La Imagen tenía escrita debajo “Yo soy la Virgen de la Caridad.” El milagro fue que la Imagen estaba completamente seca cuando la recogieron del mar. Inspirados, los tres hombres presentaron La Ima-



gen al pueblo del Cobre donde construyeron el Santuario donde ahora está. El tema general de esta historia popular es verdad, pero aún falta detalles históricos que nos va ayudar a entender las condiciones y el contexto socio-económico y político en Cuba en los siglos XVI y XVII.

El contexto de Cuba durante esos tiempos era la colonización española de la Isla en que el gobierno y explotaron a los nativos de la Isla, además de los esclavos africanos que trajeron, para trabajar en las minas de la Isla. Una de estas minas estaba cerca de Santiago de Cuba donde en 1599, el Capitán de Artillería, Don Francisco Sánchez de Moya estaba encargado de mantenerlas. Este detalle es importante porque, de acuerdo con el sacerdote historiador Monseñor Ramón Polcari, Sanchez de Moya en 1609 permitió tener una ermita dedicada a Nuestra Señora de Guía Madre de Dios que viene de Illescas en España. En la ermita, los esclavos africanos y nativos se encontraban con la Fe Católica y recibían catecismo del clérigo que estaba cuidando la iglesia pequeña.



La procesión de Nuestra Señora durante La Santa Misa, yo estoy a la derecha alado de mi hermana.

Fue durante este tiempo en que el hallazgo ocurrió y la veneración a La Imagen se hizo popular. Hay recuerdos históricos de los eventos de la aparición, empezando con tres historias escritas por el primer, séptimo y noveno Capellán del Santuario donde aún está la Imagen. Pero la evidencia histórica más interesante es de la entrevista que los oficiales civiles y clérigos hicieron a Juan Moreno, uno de los tres rancheros estuvo en el hallazgo.

Moreno describe como, después del hallazgo, trajeron La Imagen al altar a una parroquia local por las órdenes de Sanchez de Moya, el Administrador de las minas. Moreno continúa con la historia, describiendo milagros que pasaban con La Imagen. Por ejemplo, hubo un instante en que La Imagen desapareció por la noche y por la mañana estaba en el altar con sus vestidos mojados. La construcción del santuario fue otro milagro y fenómeno sobrenatural. Cuando estaban investigando a donde construir ese nuevo santuario, vieron tres luces sobre el Cerro de la Mina y decidieron construir el Santuario sobre ese mismo lugar.

Con esta entrevista y con las historias escritas por los Capellanes del Santuario se puede concluir una fecha tentativa de cuando pasó el hallazgo y es el año 1612. También podemos concluir que la evidencia histórica es suficiente para dar credibilidad al hallazgo de la Virgen.

Para entender también el contexto histórico en relación al episcopal cubano, el Obispo de la Isla entera era Alonso Toledo de Almenares y fue un Obispo servicial al pueblo recorriendo la isla tres veces. También, él pudo traer reconocimiento a Cuba y a la Iglesia de Latinoamérica con su participación en el Sínodo provincial de Santo Domingo que también incluyó a Venezuela y Puerto Rico. En su recuento de la historia de Cuba, Monseñor Suarez no hace una conexión entre el crecimiento de la devoción a la Imagen, a través de la construcción del Santuario, y las actividades del Obispo Toledo de Almenares. Pero se puede hacer la asunción que el Obispo, en uno de sus viajes alrededor de la Isla, visitó La Imagen en a La Mina del Cobre mientras estaban construyendo el Santuario.

A sumar, el contexto histórico alrededor del hallazgo de la Virgen involucra: la colonización española, la evangelización católica, la reestructura sociológico con la integración de diferentes poblaciones y las ganancias económicas de España en las minas de Cuba a través de la esclavitud. En ese contexto humano, lleno de virtud y pecado, llegó La Imagen de la Virgen que todavía está tocando los corazones cubanos en la Isla y en el exilio.

Pero, aunque se entiende el contexto histórico de la aparición todavía hay una objeción que la Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre es solamente La Imagen de Illescas de España que Sánchez de Moya trajo cuando

estaba encargado de La Mina del Cobre. Esta objeción fue formulada por la “historiadora e investigadora Irene Aloha Wriarth (1872-1972)” aunque la objeción no es válida por el hecho que la evidencia que Wriarth uso para su argumento era hasta el año 1660 y la documentación de la entrevista de Juan Moreno era el año 1687, esa omisión de evidencia curial demuestra que la objeción no sirve contra la credibilidad de la aparición de la Virgen. Al fin, es con fe, aunque sea una fe primitiva, que el pueblo cubano se acerca a la Imagen de La Virgen del Cobre.

Se ha mencionado en este reporte el impacto que la Virgen del Cobre tiene en los cubanos en tiempos contemporáneos. Esto es evidente en el hecho de que cada año en el ocho de septiembre hay una celebración grande en las parroquias de la Habana y de las de Santiago de Cuba donde todavía está el Santuario.

Es más, el que era líder de la Iglesia Católica en Cuba al fin del siglo XX y al principio del siglo XXI, El Cardenal Jaime Ortega, escribió estas palabras en referencia al título de La Virgen del Cobre:

“Con ese título, Dios quiso regalarle a todo a todo nuestro pueblo, como patrona y protectora, a la Madre de su Hijo. ‘Yo soy la Virgen de la Caridad’ se leía en la tabla sobre la cual flotaba en la bahía de Nipe, la imagen venerada hasta hoy por millones de cubanos en su altar de El Cobre,” (Énfasis puesto por el autor).

También en el Exilio hay una celebración grande, especialmente por parte de la Archidiócesis de Miami donde el pueblo local se reúne en la Arena de La Universidad de Miami para celebrar La Santa Misa cada año. En Miami hay una réplica de La Imagen original y tiene su Santuario en La Ermita de La Virgen de la Caridad que se construyó bajo la dirección de Monseñor Agustín Román Obispo Auxiliar de Miami. La Ermita ha sido un oasis para los cubanos del Exilio en donde encuentran esperanza y están consolados después de pasar por la tragedia de irse de la Isla por culpa del régimen comunista. Cuando visitó la Ermita en Miami el Cardinal Arzobispo de La Habana, Jaime Ortega dijo estas palabras durante su homilía expresando el sufrimiento del cubano exiliado:

“A esta ermita acuden los cubanos que llegan a estas tierras, también ella puede contar la historia del pueblo cubano de este lado del mar...! ¡Cuántos testimonios del corazón recoge aquí la Virgen de la Caridad de quienes rezaron agradecidos a sus plantas por haber llegado [a los Estados Unidos]!”

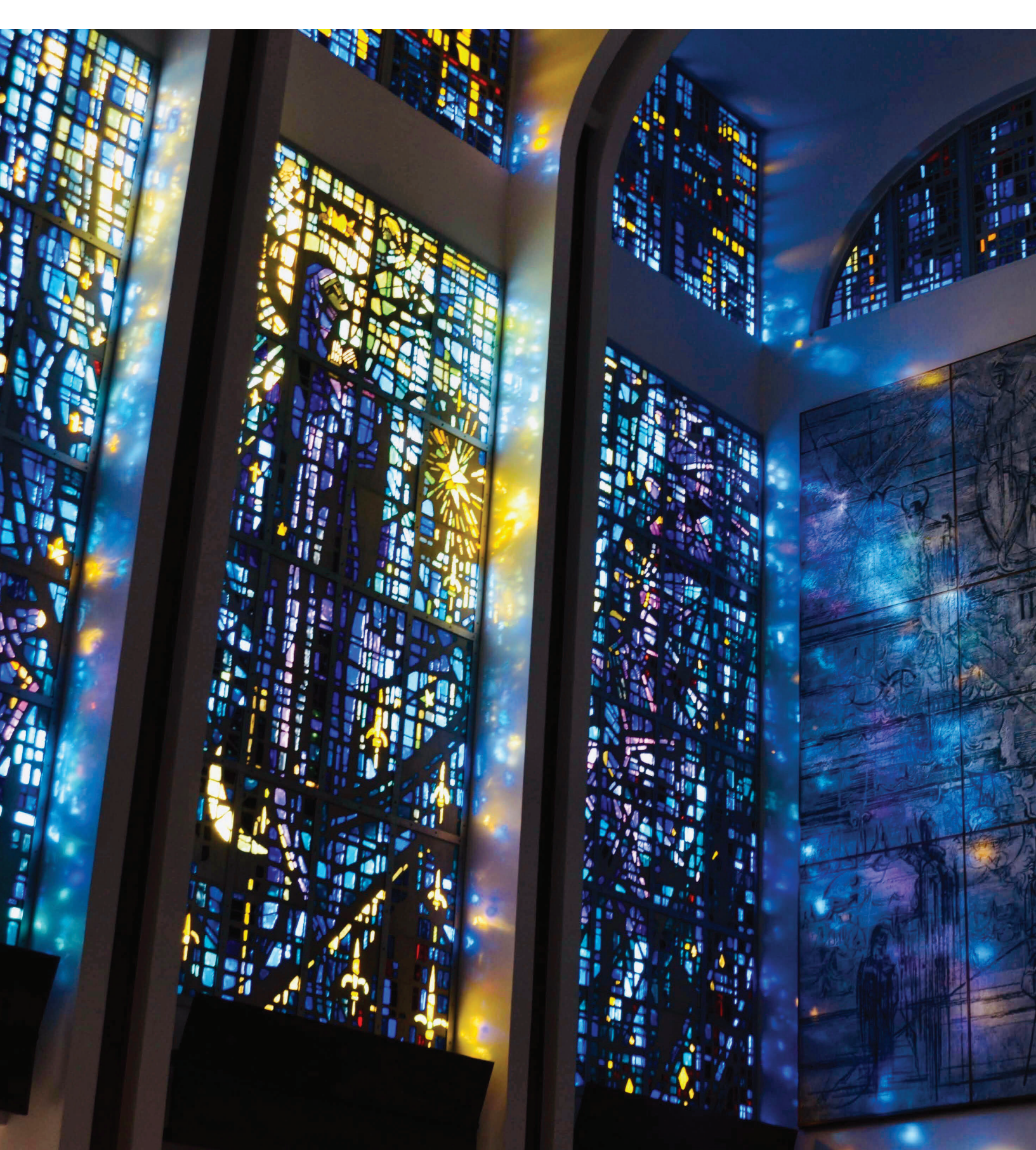
Desde el tiempo colonial a los tiempos contemporáneos, La Imagen de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre será siempre la guía a la Fe, Esperanza y Amor para el Pueblo Cubano.



Mi hermana, Maria Teresa Vazquez, y yo enfrente de con replica La Imagen de Nuestra Señora de Cobre



El 8 de septiembre del 2018, yo tuve la oportunidad de participar con Encuentros Juveniles el honor de procesar con la réplica de La Imagen de Nuestra Señora de Caridad.





> **HIDDEN BEAUTY.** God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16). Therefore, We understand God in the darkness of mystery contrasted with the light of faith and reason. Like a masterpiece of art or a sacred place of worship, the contrast between light and dark, structure and void, more vividly expresses the form and beauty of the object . Darkness here refers to mystery: what we do not fully comprehend. It does not refer to evil or lack of goodness or truth, but instead represents what is beyond our understanding. Saint Paul reminds us "We see now dimly as in a mirror, but then we shall see the Lord face to face. Now I know in part then I shall understand fully" (1 cor 13:12). Let us meditate on and appreciate side-by-side, the mystery, reason and revelation which can guide us deeper into union with God, Who is the ultimate & infinite Mystery, yet, at the same time is ever revealing Himself to us.



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