



## DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Commencement Speech  
St. Joseph's Seminary College  
Covington, Louisiana  
May 13, 2011

Dear Archbishop Aymond, Father Gregory, faculty, staff, and students,

I thank you all for the invitation to be with you today and to be able to visit the school and monastery as well as share this important day with you! I have to say that I do not have the blessing and background of having attended a college seminary. I was 25 when I decided to give vocational discernment a serious try, so I had to *literally* cram 18 hours of philosophy into one year before I went on to theology. This was "way back" in 1976, and because there were a group of us in Springfield at the time that were more mature, let us say, they were not really sure what to do with us. We were called the "Special Students." We didn't have the blessing of having the extra time that you do, with your college formation program [so much better these days], for the prayer, serious discernment, and study of theology and Scripture as well.

I would like to reflect a bit on what I think this time has offered you as you now move on to the next steps in deepening your faith and prayer life, and in that context, your continued discernment of the Lord's will as you seek to hear the His call to priestly ministry.

I don't make a claim to be very "tech savvy", but this past year I recently started using an iPad, and of all things, I now do a "web log" or "blog!" I carry the iPad with me a lot, but sometimes I have a challenge trying to keep it at a viewable angle when I am using it or holding it steady in a fixed position. Well, that problem was recently solved when some friends of mine got me a Rocketfish iPad stand for my birthday so I could always make sure that I had the right frame of reference for my daily work from this device.

The analogy that I would like to make today is that your years here at St. Benedict's are like that iPad stand I received for my birthday. They are a point of reference, a perspective on life, faith, and your relationship with the Lord to help you see, to keep you directed in the correct angle, and to keep you fixed and steady in your seeking of the Lord's will as you now enter theology. What you have experienced here will serve you well in the days and months ahead. Your time here has been part of what I would call the Lord's providential care for you, to prepare you for the study, prayer and discernment that lies ahead of you, so that you may enter this part of life with joy and enthusiasm [enthusiasm comes from the Greek meaning "in God"]. Years ago, when now Archbishop George Lucas installed me as the pastor of Blessed Sacrament parish in Springfield, Illinois, he said that in ministry, one part of your life prepares you for the next. I have

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certainly found that to be true and I know [after nearly 30 years a priest] that it will be similar for you as well.

This Rocketfish iPad stand shows several ways that the it can be held steady from where one could see. I would propose three ways in which what you have experienced here can "hold you steady" in the face of a new life and new challenges, that you can see the hand of God and hear the Lord's voice again to "Come follow me."

### FRATERNAL LIFE

So much of seminary formation is founded on what can be called 'fraternal life'. That is to say, the relationships that has been born out of a time together in apostolic work, prayer [Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours], theological reflection, meals together, recreation, and simply fun. There are also the accompanying struggles and difficulties that you have shared with each other. These form bonds of friendship that you will take with you onto theology, as even new friendships and relationships lie ahead of you. Yet, it is these relationships that have anchored you in many ways, and are one way in which the Lord has chosen to speak with you. Priestly ministry, and especially that of diocesan priesthood, is predicated on a whole series of relationships in the parish and other places. The foundation for that is laid here. You now have seminary "classmates." Archbishop Dolan, in one of his conferences to the seminarians at the North American College in Rome, once said that "one of the proudest things a priest can say is that he is my classmate." In a meeting with youth in Rome before the 21st annual World Youth Day in April of 2006, Pope Benedict XVI said "What does the Lord want of me? Of course, this is always a great adventure, but life can be successful only if we have the courage to be adventurous, trusting that the Lord will never leave me alone, that the Lord will go with me to help me." That my brothers, what we have learned from our life together, teaches us that the Lord will not leave us alone, and that He will indeed go with us to help.

### ST. BENEDICT

You have been blessed to have these years of formation in the context of the life and history of the Benedictine tradition. I would guess that some of you, given the lack of familiarity with the history of Benedict, and just the general lessening of the knowledge of Catholic tradition and language and vocabulary, had little or no knowledge of St. Benedict. Yet, now that is a part of your history and life, and something you take with you. Certainly, the framework of all is the Benedictine rule, with the centerpiece being work and prayer. That you take with you. You will now go on to other models of seminary formation, perhaps in the tradition of diocesan clergy, or even perhaps the Sulpician. Yet, from your years here, you have a point of reference, another angle to help keep you steady to see the hand of God. Pope

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Benedict, early on in his Pontificate, [July 10, 2005 at the *Angelus*] spoke of St. Benedict in saying that Benedict "pointed out to his followers the search for God as the fundamental and indeed, one and only aim of life: "[to seek God]." ...The monks' program of life was "to prefer nothing else to Christ." Holiness consists of this, a sound proposal for every Christian that has become a real and urgent pastoral need in our time, when we feel the need to anchor life and history to sound spiritual formation." Part of who you are now, then is to seek God...to prefer nothing else to Christ. Take that with you, and then share it with others. You, like all of us, are faced with the task of rebuilding a civilization, not unlike St. Benedict. It begins with seeking God in all things -- to prefer NOTHING else to Christ.

### POPE JOHN PAUL II

We have just lived through an amazing and profound celebration of the Beatification of Pope John Paul II. I was blessed enough to be able to be in Rome in the early years of his Pontificate and had the blessing to meet him a number of times. I would recommend to you to let him speak to you in the coming months and years of your seminary formation. The background of your years here, and especially this last year, is anchored in his Beatification. These books are *Gift and Mystery* [about his early life and formation and priestly ministry] and *Rise Let us be On Our Way* [about his appointment as a Bishop and years of ministry as Bishop. In *Gift and Mystery* one can discern all of the influences and experiences that the Holy Spirit used in the formation of his vocation to the priesthood. In one place, he has words that sounds as if he is speaking directly to you today: "May God sustain in all priests a grateful awareness of the gift they have received; may he also awaken in many young a ready and generous response to his call to give themselves completely to the cause of the Gospel. The men and women of our time, who have much need of meaning and hope, will greatly benefit from their witness. And the Christian community will rejoice, knowing that it can look forward with confidence to the challenges of the approaching Third Millenium."

We are, already, brothers and friends, well into the Third Millenium. I pray that you, who will be priests now of this Third Millennium, will take what you have learned and prayed here as part of the fabric of your lives that will serve you as you continue your adventure and journey to serve the Lord, and the people to whom He will send you. In the second book of Blessed Pope John Paul II, which I mentioned, he speaks to you and to us again, "Rise, let us be on our way!" Let us go forth full of trust in Christ. He will accompany us as we journey toward the goal that He alone knows."

God bless you always,  
+ Most Reverend Bishop Kevin Vann

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