

TO BE WITH HIM AND TO SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH

Homily of Cardinal Jorge Urosa, Archbishop of Caracas,
on the occasion of the 100th Anniversary of St. Augustine's Seminary of
Toronto. St. Michael's Cathedral, September 25th, 2013

I was very happy and honored to receive His Eminence Cardinal Thomas Collins' invitation to preside the Holy Eucharist in this solemn occasion. I want to thank him and the organizers of the centenary celebrations. You have made it possible for me to publicly express my sincere gratitude to this dear Church of Toronto for the solid formation I received some 50 years ago in St. Augustine's Seminary.

We are celebrating the 100th anniversary of our Seminary in the Year of Faith. Our celebration will certainly help us to renew and deepen our faith in Christ, the Eternal High Priest, in our own priesthood, and in the Eucharist, the fountain and summit of Christian life.

In his Gospel, St. Mark tells us that Our Lord Jesus "went up the mountain and summoned those whom he wanted; and they went to him. He appointed twelve of them, whom he called apostles, to be with him, and send them out to preach, with power to drive out the demons". (Mk 3, 14)

"To be, to stay with Him, and to send them out to preach": the Apostles lived with Jesus for three years, seeing and listening to him; going with him through the roads of Judea, Galilee and Samaria. They witnessed His miracles, heard His teachings, felt His immense goodness and mercy to the repentant sinner and to the poor. They saw him to lovingly care for His followers, feed the crowd with two fishes and 5 loaves of bread; they were given to perceive the flashes of His divinity, and were sent out to preach the good news of God's Kingdom. And furthermore, they felt the grandeur of Jesus at the Last Supper, were devastated by His Passion and death, only to later be comforted by His glorious resurrection. Gradually they had been given the mission and ministry to announce the Gospel, and to forgive sins. Above all, right before the Passover, they received the power and mandate to perpetuate the wonderful Eucharistic banquet and sacrifice through the ages, as we are doing right now: "Do this in remembrance of me".

I have pointed this out because for us alumni, and for all candidates to the priesthood, our years at St. Augustine's were "being and staying with Jesus". As it was with the Apostles, we were able to know Him, to become more closely His friends and witnesses; to have a personal and warm relationship with Him, who united in love to His Heavenly Father, gave and offered His flesh for the life of the world (Cfr. Jo 6 52).

We, former students, had the grace to come "to be and to stay with Jesus" in this great Institute, the formation centre for more than 2000 men who eventually had the grace to be anointed priests of God. In my case, I was kindly received here in September 1962 by then Rector Msgr. Richard Dobel and Msgr. John Corrigan, the spiritual Director. In those difficult years of change during the II Vatican Council I was glad to find so many good professors, friends and classmates who made my stay at the Seminary a very pleasant one. All of us had the opportunity and the grace to know Jesus more and more, to admire and study the beautiful and deep mysteries of God, and were filled with the zeal to proclaim his wonders.

That is the goal of a Seminary: to prepare the candidates to the priesthood to identify themselves with Jesus, to have his very same feelings, to be good shepherds of the Lord's people, after God's own heart. In these 100 years, St. Augustine's has strived to be faithful to his "mission to form candidates as responsible and apostolic persons for the service of the Church and world by fostering faithful love for Jesus Christ, his Church and all people; to engender in us a commitment to hand on faithfully the traditions, teachings and history of the Church, to explore the mysteries of faith through sustained scriptural and theological inquiry; communal life through sharing faith, prayer and wisdom" (St. Augustine's Seminary web page).

Our Seminary was founded at the beginning of the XXth century by Archbishop Fergus McEvay, who started the construction of the building in October 1910. It was opened and dedicated by Archbishop Neil McNeil, on August 28th 1913. It was the first Major Seminary for English Canada. Let's bless the Lord for those two great Archbishops. Certainly they gave a great impetus to the life and growth of the Church in Ontario and the rest of Canada. Since then, thousands of men have come to St Augustine's, anxious to consecrate their lives to the Lord, to follow Jesus Christ, to serve the People of God, and imitate Christ, our Good Shepherd.

For such is the essence of the catholic priesthood: to become like Jesus, who gives His life for his sheep, who loved his people in the world to the end (Cfr Jo 13, 2), who offered Himself to the Father on the Cross for the redemption of mankind. And every priest receives that mission, that ministry, that consecration. We are called by our bishops, the successors of the Apostles, to make Jesus present in the world. We are called to evangelize, that is to preach His good news of salvation to all those who live in the shadows of death, and to offer ourselves with Him and like Him for the peace, the fullness of life, the happiness, in short, for the eternal salvation of human kind. In a special way, as Jesus offered himself at the last Supper and on the Cross, we priests are to offer ourselves in homage of love to our heavenly Father. That is why we came to St. Augustine's. To acquire the same attitude and feelings that Jesus had, as St Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians. (Ph. 2, 5)

That was and always will be the Mission of a Seminary. My experience during my years of formation here is that St. Augustine's did a fine job. The winds of change of the Second Vatican Council were starting to blow. Our Seminary had a wonderful staff of priests. I must say that I admired them at the time and to this day. Our formation was very demanding, to strengthen our character and to help us grow in human, christian and pastoral virtues. Thanks to many good alumni of the Seminary, the difficulties of the immediate post-council times were overcome, and the Council lines for renovation in the Church were and are followed.

Throughout the years I have been in touch with many bishops and priests of Toronto, and I can witness to the high quality of men of God, priests of the Lord, trained by our Seminary during the past century. Among them – allow me to mention these dear friends by name – Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic and Archbishop Tony Meagher, as well as Fathers Bill and Dave Harding. Yes, I am convinced that St. Augustine's has done a mighty fine job. And I am sure that it keeps doing it now, with the new initiatives like the Toronto School of Theology, the Diaconate program, the Institute of Theology, and the Spiritual Year recently instituted by Cardinal Collins.

Personally I give thanks to God for my years in Scarborough. And I raise my prayers to the Lord for all those who in the past 100 years worked and continue to work at the Seminary to train good priests, witnesses of Christ, shepherds of the Holy Catholic Church: the Archbishops and Auxiliary Bishops of Toronto, the consecutive faculty staffs, the benefactors, and all the

men who at some time in this beautiful history have been part of the student body of St. Augustine's Seminary.

Conclusion

My dear brothers and sisters: I invite you to pray to the Lord for the current staff and students of the Seminary, so that they may live with joy their call to be and to stay with Jesus, to be sent to announce and to proclaim the wonders of God Our Savior.

May God almighty grant us to grow in our faith in Christ, the eternal High Priest, the Good Shepherd. Let Him increase in the Church and in all of us our faith in the ordained priesthood and in the Holy Eucharist, which is the memorial of His love and victory. For that, we invoke the heavenly intercession of our mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

My dear brothers and sisters:

With joy and gratitude let us bless the Lord for the abundant gifts of grace granted by Him to the Church through St. Augustine's Seminary of Toronto. Amen.