

BE NOT AFRAID!

Reflection of Mother Adela to Seminarians at St. John Marie Vianney College Seminary
Archdiocese of Miami

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It is with such a great joy and gratitude to the Lord that I take this opportunity to speak to you seminarians of St. John Marie Vianney. It is such a gift to see the faces of those for whom I pray and for whom all the Sisters pray every day. Recently I had the grace to be before the remains of St. John Vianney in the Basilica at Ars. There, I prayed for each one of you and for all of you. I also did, in your name, (and I am sorry for not having asked you before, but love has no limits in prayer) the act of love written by this saint. I brought with me some cards with this prayer for you to have.



When Fr. Rios called last week to invite me to come, he told me, "Share with them, Mother, whatever the Holy Spirit puts in your heart." While praying, the Lord reminded me that in all my dealings and relationships with seminarians, many times I have found a common denominator: fear. I do not know if this is also your reality, but in case it is, I would like to tell you, "Be not afraid." Fear is caused, many times, by understanding the measure, the height, and the depth of the vocation and gift you have received and also understanding the measure of the response the gift demands. I do not intend to give you a conference but rather to speak from my heart and invite you not to be afraid.

Do Not be Afraid...

...to leave everything for Christ and to generously embrace the vocation you have received.

A vocation is a mystery of divine election, of God's call to your heart - to you personally. He has called you by name, He chose you from among many. "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (Jn 15:16). This election needs to be pondered in your hearts. You have been chosen by God to a personal, intimate relationship with Him and to a participation in His priestly Heart, life and mission. Your vocation is not an accident, something that you can take lightly or superficially, because as the Lord says in Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (1:5).

Why have you been chosen? I do not know...and you do not either. It is part of the mystery of love. "Love," as Pope Benedict said to the seminarians in Cologne, "knows no 'why'; it is a free gift to which one responds with the gift of self" (Aug. 19, 2005). You have been given a gift of love, to which you can only respond with the totality of your love.

Jesus has invited you to leave everything in order to follow Him more closely. One day you heard the voice of Christ in your heart telling you, "Follow me and leave everything for me." It is a call to renounce other options in life and to choose this path of closeness and intimacy with Him, but it is not an empty renunciation. It is a call to leave something good for something greater, for a life in which you will find complete personal fulfillment, a life in which your human and spiritual potential will be expanded for the service of the Kingdom of God and for the good of humanity.

John Paul II asked seminarians and priests in his book, *Gift and Mystery*, "Could there be any greater fulfillment than to one day be able to re-present everyday in persona Christi the redemptive sacrifice of the Cross?" (cf. p.73). Could there be any greater human accomplishment than to become fully identified with Christ, the God-made-man, and to become ministers of the priesthood of Christ? What a great calling you have received!

Yes, you are called to leave everything but to gain it all...to lose your life so as to find it...to give it all to receive the All. You have to responsibly and maturely know what you are renouncing; then you can truly embrace a lifestyle that clearly represents what you have left behind. At the same time you must maturely and

visibly represent the life that you have found.

Your eyes are not to be fixed on what you left, but on what you have been given and on the treasure you will find. As St. Paul told the Philippians, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ" (3:8).

...of your inadequacy for such a sacred vocation.

Every vocation to the priesthood is a great mystery! It is a mystery of the love of God for man, and as I said before, a mystery of divine election. It is a mystery to be pondered, lived and treasured throughout your entire lives. How do you live with a mystery? You live as St. Joseph lived: with a heart of prayer, recollection, silence and total availability to God's will. Just before Christmas, Pope Benedict XVI directed our gaze to the figure of St. Joseph. It seems to me that his words will be an inspiration to you as you learn to live with the mystery of your own vocation.

"It is therefore particularly appropriate...to establish a sort of spiritual conversation with St. Joseph, so that he may help us live to the full this great mystery of faith... St. Joseph's silence does not express an inner emptiness but, on the contrary, the fullness of the faith he bears in his heart and which guides his every thought and action... It is a silence thanks to which Joseph...watches over the Word of God...a silence woven of constant prayer, a prayer of blessing of the Lord, of the adoration of his holy will and of unreserved entrustment to his providence" (Angelus Message, Dec. 18, 2005).

To live with the mystery of your vocation, you must develop a life of prayer, of pondering God's Word, of Eucharistic adoration, of contemplation of His works, and of total trust in Him, His grace, His providence and His power. Jesus, I trust in you!!!

You are to become like St. Joseph - guardians of the great treasures of the Church. And the priesthood is one of its very important treasures. Without priests there is no Eucharist; without priests we cannot experience the healing of Reconciliation; without priests, the Priesthood of Christ can not be extended through history. As John Paul II said in *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (PDV), "Priests are called to prolong the presence of Christ, the one high priest, embodying his way of life and making him visible in the midst of the flock entrusted to their care" (no.15).

Priesthood is a gift which infinitely transcends the individual. It is a gift that transcends you, a gift that is in you but is greater than you. This reality will be experienced throughout the course of your lives: facing the greatness of the gift with a sense of your own inadequacy, of your own incapacities and limitations. But always remember that His grace is sufficient for you and that His power is revealed in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). Recognizing the greatness of the priestly vocation and your littleness will move you to live in humility. John Paul II said in *Gift and Mystery* (p. 3-4) that when he spoke of his priesthood and gave witness to it, he was always moved to do it with great humility, knowing that he had received a gift beyond himself. He said that those called to the priesthood must remember the words of St. Paul: "God has called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue on his own purpose and the grace which he gave us" (cf. 2 Tim 1:9).

To help you live with this humble but total confidence in the grace of God, you have a great model before your eyes - the patron saint of this seminary. He is a witness to this reality. In him we can see the power of grace working through human limitations. This simple, humble and powerful saint is considered to have caused a spiritual revolution in a difficult moment for the Church in France. He made himself "a prisoner of the confessional." He spent many hours confessing, many hours in adoration before the Eucharist, and many hours dedicated to teaching catechism and directing those who sought his guidance. From a very small church in the middle of France, grace was flowing for the whole Church. All it takes, dear seminarians, is generosity and dedication to fulfill the mission to which the Lord has entrusted you!

...to be formed and transformed to become another Christ.

John Paul II said about the priesthood, "The priestly vocation is a...wondrous exchange...between God and man. A man offers his humanity to Christ, so that Christ may use him as an instrument of salvation, making him as it were into another Christ" (*Gift and Mystery*, p.72).

Each one of you offers his humanity to Christ for him to transform you into His priestly image. St. Paul says in his Second Letter to the Corinthians that “we carry this treasure in earthen vessels” (4:7). You are to recognize - with humility, honesty and also hope - that the treasure of your vocation is deposited in an earthen vessel - in a fragile, weak and imperfect vessel, but at the same time, a vessel that has received the grace to become another Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit and by a strong human, spiritual, intellectual and ascetic formation, your earthen vessel can be transformed into the image of Christ, even to the point of being able to say with St. Paul, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

Therefore, formation has the purpose of transformation. To be formed is not simply to be “informed” with new ideas. It is rather to acquire a “new form” - a new life “until Christ is formed in you” (Gal 4:19). It means a transformation of the entire person: your way of thinking, feeling, loving, reacting, acting, serving and relating to others. This formation is not only provided by your formators; it must be a personal decision of each one called to the priestly vocation. It must begin by your personal and clear understanding of your identity and the values of the priesthood: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy” (1 Cor 4:1-2). You are servants of the gift received and stewards of the graces of salvation for others.

The priestly vocation commits men to a way of life inspired by the Gospel and the life of Christ. It is inspired by the sentiments of His Heart: His sacrificial love, His poverty, His purity, His obedience, His holiness and missionary zeal. “I will give you shepherds after my own heart” (Jer. 3:15). To become one with Christ, ‘after His own heart,’ you must first know Him, contemplate Him, and enter into the depth of His Heart.

This identification with the Heart and life of Christ, can only be acquired in prayer. John Paul II said, “Prayer makes the priest and through prayer the priest becomes what he is” (Gift and Mystery, p. 88). A man called to the priesthood must first of all be a man of prayer, of communion with God, a man convinced that the time spent with the Lord is always spent in the best way possible. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the universal call to holiness; in the case of those called to the priesthood, it speaks of a special call to holiness. You are to form yourselves and allow your formators to guide you into this path of holiness; the Church and the world need holy priests. You can one day become guides and teachers only to the extent that you become authentic witnesses.

...to know and live by the Truth.

Truth is not an imposition. Like love, it is a gift freely given to be freely accepted. Truth is an act of love because it is the communication of light. It is an act of love because it is the act of a loving Father who wants to communicate it to His children. Truth being an act of love is, in essence, an invitation to freedom because Jesus said, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (Jn 8:32).

Truth makes us free - not sad, not overburdened, but joyful. Truth brings joy to our hearts and to our lives because it brings salvation, restoration, healing and guidance. As the angel told the shepherds in Bethlehem, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people” (Luke 2:10). Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” (14:6). I am the Map with clear directions to find abundant life. Therefore, His truth is the way to have abundant life - not a mediocre life, not a half-dead life, not a sterile life, but an abundant, intensively lived, very fruitful life.

Truth is light. It illumines our darkness - the areas of our hearts, minds, personalities and behaviors that are not fully reflections of His love. Truth is the Light that illumines our errors. We are not to be afraid of Truth but rather of error. Would you like to drive a car with no brakes, with an error in its mileage counter or gas gauge? Would you like to have a checking account with an erroneous amount? Would you like to take a wrong map to initiate your travel to an unknown city or take the wrong plane to go to your desired destination?

Do not be afraid to be illumined, directed, confronted and even corrected by the Truth of Christ manifested to us in Sacred Scriptures, Tradition and the Magisterium of the Church. Do not be afraid to open your hearts and minds to the Truth, for it shall make you free and lead you to an abundant life.

...to love.

Love is the definite force and the reason of for the institution of the priesthood and for you having been called. Therefore, it must be the force and the reason for you to embrace it. You were called out of love, to a vocation of love, and to find the fullness of love in this vocation. The priestly vocation is rooted in love.

Love Christ with all your heart. He called you to an intimate communion with His Heart and His love. To you He repeats the invitation He made to the first priests at the Last Supper: "Remain in my love" (Jn 15:9). He wants your heart; He wants your love and the total dedication of your being to Him, to His life, to His Church and to the extension of his Kingdom on earth. He wants your love, the potentials of your heart; He wants your whole being to be invested in "higher" things.... in His things. "Give him the gold of your freedom, the incense of your ardent prayer, the myrrh of your most profound affection" (cf. John Paul II, Message for World Youth Day 2005, no. 4).

A priestly vocation is born as an invitation to love Christ and, in His love, to love others. You need to find the beginning of your own calling in the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. "Do you love me?"..."Lord, you know that I love you"..."Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep" (Jn 21:15-17). If you love Him, you will follow Him wherever He leads you, and your heart will be expanded to love generously and sacrificially those He will entrust to your care.

Without love, no sacrifice is possible—at least not a lasting one. No one can give the totality of his life without love. Only love is eternal, so only love can sustain your faithfulness and give you the strength to do things, to offer your life to a degree that maybe you never imagined, as St. Maximilian Kolbe did in the concentration camp. Why did he give his life in place of another? For the simple reason that he gave when asked by the Nazi commander: "I am a Catholic priest." A priest is called to give his life, to love to the extreme as Jesus did. To love and give his life so that others may have it.

Love conquers fear! "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear," says St. John in his First Letter (4:18). Let the love of Christ conquer in your heart. Nothing can separate you from His love - nothing or no one. No situation, even the most difficult one: "What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?...No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us." (Rom 8:35-37).

In times of fear and in fearful situations, choose always love; choose the most loving thing to do. Let love conquer in your heart. Conquering fear is the first and indispensable step in your lives if you are to open wide the doors to Christ - first, the doors of your own hearts, then of the hearts of the people you will serve.

Someone to Teach You the Path to not be Afraid: The Blessed Mother

"Here is the secret of your vocation and your mission," said Pope Benedict to the seminarians in Cologne, "it is kept in the Immaculate Heart of Mary who watches over each one of you with a mother's love" (Aug. 19, 2005).

Why is the secret of your vocation in the Maternal Heart of Mary? We may find the answer in Pastores Dabo Vobis: "The creature who more than any other has lived the full truth of vocation is Mary the virgin mother, and She did so in intimate communion with Christ: No one has responded with a love greater than hers to the immense love of God" (no. 36). She knows what it means to love God with the totality of Her being, to offer Her life for God to accomplish in Her and through Her His designs of salvation.

Your vocation is a seed planted in your heart, but this seed must grow, mature and develop. In the process, you need to know that you have a Mother, a motherly heart, a mother's presence, to whom your vocation has been entrusted. Your vocation has been placed by Christ on the Cross under Her maternal care: "Woman, behold your Son...Son, behold your Mother" (Jn 19:26-27). When He offered His own life as a High Priest on the Cross, He entrusted St. John - and in him all those who are called to the priesthood - to the maternal care, guidance, protection and formation of the Blessed Mother.

Mary is the Mother and Teacher of your priestly vocation. Therefore, it is important for you to have a Marian dimension in your spirituality. You are to take Her, as St. John did, into your home, into your hearts, into your vocation. John Paul II told us in Redemptoris Mater that the words behold your son, "fully show the reason for

the Marian dimension of the life of Christ's disciples...This Marian dimension of a disciple of Christ is expressed in a special way precisely through this filial entrusting to the Mother of Christ, which began with the testament of the Redeemer on Golgotha. Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the Apostle John, 'welcomes' the Mother of Christ 'into his own home' and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say into his human and Christian 'I'" (no. 45).

Entrust yourselves to the maternal care of Mary so She can be your Mother and also your teacher. As John Paul said in PDV, "Mary was called to educate the one eternal priest, who became docile and subject to her motherly authority. With her example and through her intercession the Blessed Virgin keeps vigilant, watching over the growth of vocations and priestly life in the Church" (no. 82).

With Her maternal guidance and with the power of the Holy Spirit, She can form you in the image of Jesus. Who better than Her knows the resemblance of Her Son? Who better than Her contemplated the priestly Heart of Christ and His self-offering for the salvation of the world? In the School of Her Heart, learn to contemplate the mysteries of the priestly Heart of Her Son. What heart has more fully participated in the mysteries of Christ?

John Paul II told us in his apostolic letter on the Rosary, "Christians sit at the school of Mary and are led to contemplate the beauty of the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love" (Rosarium Virginis Mariae, 1).

How many wonderful things happen in the hearts of seminarians when they entrust themselves to the maternal love and guidance of the Blessed Mother. I have seen many great things! The seminary is not so much a place, said Pope Benedict, but a significant time in the life of the follower of Jesus (Cologne, Aug. 19, 2005). The seminary is a time of formation, of communion, of intimate dialogue with Christ, of preparation for the mission. It seems to me that we could call the seminary the "time of Nazareth." And if it is, what better way to spend it than the same way Jesus did: under the maternal care of Mary.

Ending prayer from the Apostolic Exhortation Pastores Dabo Vobis:

O Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ and Mother of priests, accept this title which we bestow on you to celebrate your motherhood and to contemplate with you the priesthood of your Son and of your sons called to share in his priesthood.

Accept from the beginning those who have been called, protect their growth, and through their lives accompany your sons, O Mother of Priests. Amen.

[Return to Main Page of Teachings of Mother Adela, Foundress SCTJM...](#)



Return to main page
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