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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 230306b

Monday 06.03.2023

Audience with the Community of the “Saint Mary Seminary” of the diocese of Cleveland, U.S.A.

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Community of the Saint Mary Seminary of the diocese of Cleveland, United States of America, on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of its founding.

The following is the Pope’s address to those present at the audience:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Excellency,

Dear brothers and sisters, good day!

I offer a warm welcome to you, priests, deacons, seminarians, faculty and staff of Saint Mary’s Seminary, and I thank Bishop Edward Malesic for his words of greeting in the name of all.

Dear friends, your visit here to Rome, to the heart of the Church, takes place as you celebrate the one hundred seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of your seminary. This occasion is a fitting opportunity to give thanks to God for the great number of priests formed by your Institution over the course of these years. I am also pleased to know that the seminary continues to respond to the present-day needs of the Church by educating and training deacons and lay ministers to assist God’s holy people in living their call to be missionary disciples. This call assumes ever greater importance in light of the synodal journey that the whole Church is now undertaking.

As you progress on the way that leads to ordination and pastoral service, I would like to share with you some brief reflections on three characteristics of the synodal journey that are also essential for your formation as future priests and ministers of the Gospel.

The first characteristic is *listening*, above all to the Lord. We know that by ourselves we can do nothing, for “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain” (Ps 127:1). This awareness calls us to make room in our lives for the Lord every day, to meditate on his word, to find light for our path through the help of spiritual accompaniment, and especially to spend time with him in prayer, listening to him in silence before the Tabernacle. Never forget the importance of placing yourselves before the Lord to hear what he wants to say to you. In fact, listening to God’s voice deep within our hearts and discerning his will is indispensable for our interior growth, particularly when we encounter urgent and difficult tasks. In this regard, seminary life already provides you the possibility of cultivating a habit of prayer that will serve you well in future ministry. Likewise, listening to the Lord also involves the response of faith to all that he has revealed and that the Church hands on, so that you will be able to teach and proclaim to others the truth and beauty of the Gospel in an authentic and joyful way.

The second characteristic of the synodal journey that I propose to you is *walking together*. Your time of seminary formation is an opportunity to deepen the spirit of fraternal communion, not only among yourselves, but also with your Bishop, the presbyterate of the local Church, those living the consecrated life and the lay faithful, as well as with the universal Church. We should recognize that we are part of one great people which has received God’s promises as a gift, not as a privilege. In the same way, your vocation is a gift to be placed at the service of building up the body of Christ (cf. *Eph 4:12*). Indeed, the good shepherd walks with the flock: sometimes ahead, to mark the way; sometimes in the midst, to encourage them and sometimes behind, to accompany those who may be struggling. Always remember how important it is to walk with the flock, never apart from it.

Finally, the third characteristic: *witness*. Listening to God and walking together with others bears fruit in our becoming living signs of Jesus present in the world. It is my hope that the years spent in the seminary will prepare you to give yourselves completely, in celibate love and with an undivided heart, to God and his holy people. The Church needs your enthusiasm, generosity and zeal in order to show everyone that God is always with us, in every circumstance of life. I pray that, in the various educational and charitable apostolates in which you are already engaged, you will always be signs of a Church that goes forth (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20), bearing witness to and sharing the merciful love of Jesus with all in the human family, especially the poor and those in need.

Dear friends: *listening*, *walking together* and *witness* mark the Church’s synodal journey, as well as your own path towards priestly ordination. I trust that, as you progress along this path, your studies and formation at Saint Mary’s Seminary will enable you to grow in faithful love of God and humble service to our brothers and sisters. Entrusting you to the maternal intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Patroness of your seminary, I warmly bless each one of you, your families and your local Churches. And I ask you please to pray for me. Thank you!
