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## A LETTER TO SEMINARIANS

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### TO BECOME CHRIST-LIKE

“All of us, gazing on the Lord’s glory with unveiled faces, are being transformed from glory to glory into his very image by the Lord who is the Spirit. Because we possess this ministry through God’s mercy, we do not give in to discouragement. It is not ourselves we preach but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. This treasure we possess in earthen vessels to make it clear that its surpassing power comes from God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way possible, but we are not crushed; full of doubts, we never despair. Continually we carry about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that in our bodies the life of Jesus may also be revealed. While we live we are constantly being delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal flesh.”

Dear Seminarian:

I’ve been thinking about both of you and decided to put a few thoughts on paper that may be helpful in your seminary careers:

- (1) **TO BE CHRIST-LIKE.** The fundamental and ultimate aim of seminary life is to give the seminarian the time and opportunity to become Christ-Like. The studies are necessary but secondary.
- (2) **THE NEW TESTAMENT.** To become Christ-Like you must first know Christ. That comes about through studying and meditating on Christ as he is revealed in the New Testament. Every-day you should read at least one chapter of the New Testament.
- (3) **PRAYER.** The New Testament tells us that Christ spent many nights in prayer. There is no becoming Christ-like without daily prayer: especially Holy Mass, the Rosary, and a short meditation perhaps after Mass. **THESE SHOULD NOT BE OMITTED EVEN WHEN SEMINARY RULES DO NOT INSIST ON THEM!**
- (4) **SELF DISCIPLINE.** Self discipline is necessary whether we appreciate it or not in our youth. This, too, is evident in the life of Christ, if you read it closely. For example, “He had no luxuries and not even his own bed” a place where-on to lay his head.
- (5) **RULES.** Most seminaries have an external form of discipline, i. e., the “rules” and these days they are considerably easier than fifty years ago and those of fifty years ago, easier than those of a hundred years ago. Superiors determine how much or how little discipline is prudent in modern circumstances. You should inwardly accept the discipline, be it easy or difficult. Where there is none, or very little, create your own under the guidance of a good priest, counsellor or spiritual director. **THEN STICK TO IT!**

- (6) **OBJECT OF DISCIPLINE/** The idea of self-discipline and imposed discipline are to make the seminarian Christ-Like. The one who tries to “get away with everything he can” is cheating himself and undermining the “spirit” of the seminary.
- (7) **SUPERVISORS’ MISTAKES.** It is possible that supervisors may be mistaken - they are human. It is legitimate to talk to the proper authority if you feel some change should be made. However, first speak to your spiritual director. If you have chosen a good one, his advice will be sound. Void “strikes” or any kind of pressure groups.
- (8) **SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR.** It doesn’t follow that because a man is a priest, he is a good spiritual director. Take your time. Look for one who is very Christ-like in your opinion. If you can find one who is Christ-like, you can be sure he will not be ultra-liberal or ultra-conservative. In Latin they say: “In medio stat virtus” – virtue is not found in extremes.
- (9) **PRIEST FAILURES.** If you wonder why today some priest have left their sacred calling, it is because they never did become Christ-like, or ceased to strive for that finality, after some initial success.
- (10) **LACK OF DESIRE.** Probably the lack of desire to become Christ-like is the surest sign of no vocation or loss of vocation. Don’t confuse desire with fact. We can desire to be Christ-like all our lives and perhaps grow in it, but never achieve the fact, because Christ is the Perfect Ideal. There is a book, a religious classic from the Middle Ages called the Imitation of Christ, by Tomas A. Kempis. It may be difficult at first but it is sound spirituality.
- (11) **SELF KNOWLEDGE.** There is a famous spiritual principle from St. Augustine that says, “Let me know myself, that I may know Thee.” It is good to know and recognize what gifts God has given and what are one’s limitations. This is true humility. College and theology usually bring out those who are favoured intellectually to a greater degree, but this is not the main finality. Preparing oneself to bring Christ to others is more common and more important as a general rule.
- (12) **SPORTS.** Interest and participation in sports should have a distinct place in your lives. “Not too much and not too little.” Sports offer release from tension of routine and serious study. They are great for keeping in shape and I think especially salutary for those who have chosen to follow Christ, i.e., not getting married. There is nothing in the Gospels about Christ from his twelfth to thirtieth year. But being a perfect man, he probably indulged in his youth in wholesome, physical recreation; whatever that might have been in his time.
- (13) **SMOKING.** Smoking in moderation probably is not harmful; however, the evidence today is such that a prudent man (not necessarily seminarians) should avoid it altogether. I think that avoiding it altogether offers a great opportunity for self-discipline and imitation of Christ.
- (14) **WOMEN.** The women, whom God has placed in your lives, your mother, grandmother, sisters, aunts, etc., are all good and will always be a great support in your lives. However, there is another side, a very human side that may be very different. God made most men for marriage and all men have the instincts and inclinations for such a vocation. Those who are called to the priesthood are not exempted from such inclinations. Every youth is drawn by nature to the opposite sex. “Drawn” is so much different from “driven.” Those who feel marriage is their

vocation at a given age decide on one given woman, become engaged and marry. Those who are not going to marry, should:

- a. Hold in high esteem all women.
  - b. Become familiar with none. This means practically to greet, respect, and be courteous to all, young or old. At the same time it means avoiding so called “innocent” meetings or “dates.” Avoid things like studying together, tennis or other sports, parties, movies, etc. These things may in individual cases be harmless but can destroy a man’s intention to follow Christ. The need to follow a “chaste” Christ is so important today and the need for living examples of chastity so imperative in the modern world that it cannot be over-exaggerated with all the divorce, birth-control, abortion, etc. People have to see in the priest the chastity of Christ to live up to their marriage obligations.
- (15) DRINKING. Drinking, like smoking, is not wrong if kept in moderation but it is much better to void it altogether to insure being Christ-like. A layman may give great scandal when he becomes drunk, but that scandal is nothing compared to that given by a priest who is drunk or even “feeling good.” Don’t take individual men as your example, be they priests or laymen. Always try to FOLLOW AND BE LIKE CHRIST!
- (16) READING. Reading should be a great part of a priest’s life. Try in vacation time to get in an hour a day with a good book. “Good” doesn’t mean “heavy” or “deep,” but something “wholesome or inspiring.” The writings of Father Raymond, O. S. C. (Trapist) is good if still available; for example, *The Man Who God Even With God* and *The Family That Overtook Christ*. Don’t think about all that you’re giving up for Christ, think rather about “all he has given up for us” and the privilege he will give you of becoming another Christ.

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