

POST #6 - PRIESTLY ROLES AND STRUCTURE FOR SEMINARIANS

SEMINARY SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

MSGR DANIEL TRAPP



Texts for Meditation

Having encouraged the seminarian to bring his life in offering to the Lord, it is good for the director to have a schema in mind for the further material with which the seminarian will pray. I suggest the following: 1.) College I and II, solid grounding in *lectio divina*, particularly using the readings of the day's Mass; 2.) Phil I and Phil II or College III and IV, *lectio continua*, reading the New Testament for prayer in the first year of this cycle and the Old Testament in the second year (i.e., Phil II or College IV). You can find helpful schemas and grids for reading either Testament in a year on the Internet.

In the first year of studying Theology, I suggest directing the prayer of the men, in addition to Scripture, to *Presbyterorum Ordinis* and *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*. In Theology II, I would suggest that the men prayerfully read *Pastores Dabo Vobis*; and in Theology III, the *Rite of Ordination of a Deacon*, and the *Profession of Faith*. In Theology IV, I suggest having the men pray with the *Rite of Ordination of a Priest*, as well as the *Rite of Penance and Reconciliation*, and the *Order of Mass*.

Points in Prayer

The *Program of Priestly Formation* reminds us that spiritual direction in the seminary has a particular goal in addition to helping the seminarians to grow spiritually, that goal being to prepare the seminarians to serve the Church as priests.¹ The spiritual director needs to direct the men to pray: 1.) about affective maturity; 2.) with sustained discernment of their call to the celibate priesthood; 3.) about their life as a celibate; 4.) about a sacrificial life pointed toward pastoral charity. Much of a man's prayer happens during his meditation or holy hour.

Affective Maturity

In the sense used in the universal documents of the Church, affective maturity refers to *maturity of affection*, that is, our affections and desires find their term, their fulfillment, in Christ. We grow, in other words, to full stature in Christ, in whom we find the fulfillment of all desires. Ecclesial documents speak of affective maturity in the sense of the *maturity of the affect*, that is, our affect, our emotional and subjectively experienced feelings, are those of a mature adult. This means that we are not controlled by our emotions, but that we are aware of them, learn from them, and integrate them in our relations with others and with the world.

¹ *Program of Priestly Formation*, sec. 132.

Maturity of Affection

The four dimensions of seminary formation (spiritual, intellectual, human, and pastoral) all work to form the seminarian to maturity of his affections, so that he puts on Christ, so that he brings all things into the light of Christ, so that all of his life is centered on and fed by his relationship with Christ. Sounds lovely. It is the job of seminary formators to assist the men to take soundings in their prayer to see the extent to which Christ is the center of their lives and where there may be obstacles to reaching Him.

Maturity of Affect

Similarly, it is the role of seminary formators to help men find not just any maturity of affect, but that maturity of affect which comes from life in the New Creation, from their relationship with the Risen Lord in His ecclesial body. As such, maturity of affect is certainly something for which the seminary mentors, professors, and supervisors look. Since maturity of affect for the seminarian comes about through his relationship with God and in his relationships with the ecclesial Body of Christ, the seminary directors ask about it and direct the men to pray about it.

Structure

Because I find a gradual, systematic approach helpful in order to assure that all bases are covered, I will propose such a method here. I also suggest that you deconstruct it as much as you want in order to make use of the points as you think best.

In my years as a spiritual director, I have found it helpful to review in my prayer and to review with the men the three *munera* of the priesthood: priest, prophet, and pastor. Also, I have found it very beneficial to focus my attention, and that of my directees, on living out the priestly identities, as the focus of their lives. Following the work of The Institute for Priestly Formation, I list five priestly identities here: beloved son, chaste spouse, spiritual father, spiritual physician, and good shepherd. The first two identities, beloved son and chaste spouse, are fundamental; and our identities as father, physician, and shepherd flow from them. In college, one does not accomplish being a beloved son in one year and then move on to further conquests. In a similar way, in theology, one does not achieve a spousal relationship and then tackle further matters. Because of the foundational importance of a man's first year in formation and his first year in theology, I have listed beloved son and chaste spouse as the keys to those years.

In a particular way, it has seemed to me that many men who are not able to live out their lives as priests have had some kind of block with the priestly identities and the affective maturity which is necessary in order to live out the response of diocesan priests to Jesus' counsels. So, the following chart can be a convenient way to hold up the identities and marks of affective maturity as goals for discussion.

First College: Beloved Son

The seminarian has a desire for:

- following the will of God as known through the Church and through the seminary leadership
- ordering his life toward growth and becoming a man
- passionate service to God and the Church
- sacrificing all for that which is good, beautiful, and true

Shows emotional maturity by:

- interdependent relationships
- respectfully and calmly challenging perceived injustices
- balancing the needs of friendship and brotherhood
- a healthy ability to grow from childhood dependence on his family
- avoiding binge behavior with different kinds of pleasure

Second College: Spiritual Father

The seminarian has a desire for:

- reaching out to those far from Christ or the Church
- solidarity with those who are in service positions in the seminary community
- growing ability to respect authority figures without overly desiring to please them
- serving the poor
- bringing truth and reconciliation in places where lies and estrangement reign

Shows emotional maturity by:

- admitting sins and mistakes and knowing the difference
- working to balance responsibilities with leisure
- learning to address perceptions of injustice with simplicity and candor
- striving to bring into the light fears and insecurities
- growing appreciation of his gifts and talents

Third College/First Philosophy: Spiritual Physician

The seminarian has a desire for:

- confident servant leadership
- counsel, the ability to choose correctly among the options of life
- integration of his entertainments with the life of a priest
- justice balanced with mercy
- purity as a source of pastoral strength

Shows emotional maturity by:

- being open to new ideas while being faithful to the essentials of the Faith
- zeal for service of the poor
- energy and enthusiasm for setting prisoners free, especially those imprisoned by sin
- being compassionate with the limitations and sins of others
- freedom for new pastoral experiences in different cultures or different sociological communities

Fourth College/Second Pre Theology: Good Shepherd

The seminarian has a desire for:

- continuing with more committed service to Christ
- clarity based in ongoing discernment of his vocation, despite fears and difficulties
- knowing God's will for his life and for the Church
- growing in virtue and accurate self-knowledge
- intimacy with the Lord, friendship and fraternity with others

Shows emotional maturity by:

- bringing old wounds to the Lord for healing
- willingness to help those new to formation
- collaboration with formators in providing leadership in the house
- growing ability to balance lightheartedness with appropriate seriousness
- living a life according to principles and a personal rule of life

First Theology: Chaste Spouse

The seminarian has desire for:

- sacrificial self-giving
- praying liturgical prayer faithfully
- joyful renunciation of marriage in response to the Lord's love
- holiness and integrity
- love for the unfortunate

Shows emotional maturity by:

- having close friends and avoiding dependence
- being aware of his needs and seeking to fulfill them
- showing understanding of the difference between his needs and desires
- the ability to pray affectively, able to enter the paschal nature of Christian discipleship
- responding with appropriate warmth and reserve, affection and restraint

Second Theology: Spiritual Father

The seminarian has a desire for:

- receiving the Word of God
- becoming wise according to the Church's Tradition
- learning the truth
- self-knowledge of his gifts, his areas of poverty, his areas of concupiscence
- a life lived trusting in Divine Providence

Shows emotional maturity by:

- confronting limitations with self-possession and charity
- being capable of trusting himself and others
- identifying anger and using it appropriately
- being capable of spontaneity and observing social norms
- being clearly rooted in the love of God in Christ

Third Theology: Spiritual Physician

The seminarian has a desire for:

- organizing his life for sacrificial service
- shepherding a Christian community
- understanding things as they are in God's plan
- sacrificing himself for the flock
- praying always and truly serving the Lord

Shows emotional maturity by:

- not masking emotional needs with theological positions
- being free to listen to a superior without being bound by past memories
- being able to face conflicts and deal bravely with procrastination
- living a life relatively free of compulsions
- being able to choose how to express emotions

Fourth Theology: Good Shepherd

The seminarian has a desire for:

- freeing people from the limitations of secular society
- fidelity to Christ and those he serves, even when efforts fail
- building unity among his classmates
- assisting younger seminarians in following Christ
- dying and rising with Christ through his service in the Church

Shows emotional maturity by:

- living out his identities as beloved son, redeemed sinner, and temple of the Holy Spirit
- relating in simplicity with both priest and lay faculty
- being appropriately transparent and self-disclosive
- providing firm leadership, when needed, and being comfortable in support roles, when needed
- relating with simplicity and competence in roles of public service