

Dehon Lecture October 7, 2015
Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology

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Note: the written text does not include extemporaneous comments made by Fr. John during his presentation

Introduction

I want to begin with some disclaimers, as it were.

In the invitation that I received from Monsignor Ross to be the presenter for the Dehon Lecture this year he wrote and I quote: “As it is the year for Consecrated Life, the topic we were considering was a reflection on the unique vocational calls of priests in consecrated life as well as diocesan priests—both of whom are formed here at SHSST for the priesthood—and the valuable synergy which is generated for the good of the Church's mission from their common efforts.” I told him that the word “lecture” frightens me because I have never considered myself an academician even though I taught here for five years. Doing spiritual formation in one way or other has always been the gift with which I feel God has blessed me. As Monsignor and I talked he made me feel more at ease in accepting the invitation because he said that while the folks here at SHSST had named the topic, I had the freedom to treat the topic in a way that worked best for me.

What works best for me is speak to you from the point of view of someone who has been involved, for over 40 years, in the formation of men preparing for ordination to the priesthood and/or profession of vows in a religious community. So, as I speak, very often I will be addressing those in formation or those who are already ordained. I do not mean to exclude the rest of you present here. I just don't know how to do this otherwise. Please bear with me.

So let me tell you a bit about myself—who I am and where I come from as I reflect on this topic with you. When it comes to speaking about my vocation, I am one of those persons that is called “a lifer.” I turned fourteen two weeks after I left home to enter the minor seminary. I left home because I somehow felt I was supposed to be a priest. At that age I don't even think I named this call as coming from God. So I left home to be a priest and along the way I grew into being a religious. Through the years of my formation with the Priests of the Sacred Heart, the SCJs, I came in touch with a group of men whose view of the Gospel and God gave expression to what I was coming to believe and value. So although I left home to be a priest, I now say I am a religious who serves as a priest. I have been a professed member of the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart for 59 years and an ordained priest for almost 52 years. During most of those years with our community I have been involved in formation (my own and that of others) except for six years when I was the provincial of our community.

Now let me say a bit about how we SCJs come to be involved in formation, in being the major sponsor of this seminary and school of theology. Our Rule of Life (Constitution # 30) says: “Although our Institute was not founded for a specific work, it gets from the Founder some apostolic orientations, which characterize its mission in the Church.” Then Constitution # 31 names four orientations:

- 1) Eucharistic adoration, as an authentic service of the Church. (We might tend to say that adoration is more like something monks would be involved in. Father Dehon saw this is an apostolic service in the Church. He believed that the mission of the Church was advanced because we participated in Eucharistic adoration. Sometimes you can do more good talking with God about people than talking with people about God.)
- 2) Ministry to the lowly and the humble, the workers and the poor
- 3) WITH THIS MINISTRY IN MIND, Father Dehon gave great importance to the formation of priests and religious (that was extended to laity as well although it is not stated explicitly in our Constitutions.)
- 4) For him missionary activity was a privileged form of apostolic service.

What I want to emphasize here are the words used to introduce the third orientation for ministry that we received from Father Dehon. It is with the ministry to the lowly and the humble, the workers and the poor in mind that we are involved in the formation of others for ministry. The formation that is received at Sacred Heart has to have that distinctive characteristic about it. Everyone who receives formation for ministry at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology should be being formed, inspired to give special attention in their ministry to those who tend to be neglected in society, to have a preferential option for the poor, because that is why we Priests of the Sacred Heart sponsor this institution in the first place.

So that tells you a bit about me and the Priests of the Sacred Heart which influences what I have to say about this topic.

Key Statement

In October of 2011 the Conference of Major Superiors of Men issued a twenty-two page document dealing with the topic of formation of religious for priestly ministry. Near the end of that document there was a summary of what they wrote and in that summary there was one sentence which, in my estimation, was central to everything they wrote and which is central to everything that I am going to say. Here it is:

“Diocesan clergy have as their intended ministry assistance to the bishop as pastors of the people of God in a particular diocese; whereas religious clergy, although often enough they exercise ministry in a parish setting, have as their intended ministry the pastoral expression of the charism and mission of their institutes for the sake of the Church.”

Everything I want to share is somehow related to that key statement.

Part I

So first let me reflect with you about the diocesan priesthood. What does a diocesan priest look like? What is his life and ministry about?

Every diocesan priest is an extension of the bishop with his brothers in the local presbyterate. When a man is ordained by his local ordinary, the bishop takes his hands into his hands and asks the man: “do you promise obedience to me and my successors?” It is as if he is saying to that man: “God has entrusted the care of the people in this diocese to me. I cannot do this alone. Will you help me so together we can give these folks loving service? Will you make that commitment, please?” My brothers, those of you here from various dioceses, get to know your bishop. Be connected to him. I remember when Cardinal Bernadin came to Chicago as the new ordinary there. He had a meeting with all the clergy of the diocese and he used an incident from the forty-fifth chapter of Genesis to indicate the kind of relationship he wanted to have with the priests of Chicago. Remember what Joseph said to his brothers when he finally reveals his identity to them? He said: “I am Joseph, your brother.” That is the kind of relationship that needs to develop with you and your bishop and with your fellow priests in the diocese.

I hope that some priest support groups exist for you to become a part of. If they do not, see what you can do about getting one started.

One observation from my past experience here at Sacred Heart. It can happen at times that not all the priests in a diocese have been through the same seminary experience. When that happens you may be moving into a situation where you are the “new kid on the block”. Some of you here are from different cultures. To be a “new kid on the block” is an expression that indicates a person who enters a situation where some relationships have been in existence for some time and you may feel like an outsider, you may feel that you are not accepted. Use the skills you have used here at SHSST to become part of this group. The guys whom you do not know are not against you. They just do not know you. Let them get to know you. It may take some time. Be patient and gentle with yourself and with them, as you move into this new situation, if that is the way it is.

As I reflected on how I might organize my thoughts about the ministry of a diocesan priest, I remembered something I had read in Canon Law. Some folks (and I have to admit I used to be among that number) have a kind of unfavorable bias about Canon Law. But some of the most pastorally inspiring and challenging words about what is expected of a diocesan priest that I have ever reflected on are contained in Canons 528 and 529 of the 1983 revision of the Code of Canon Law. These particular numbers of the Code are addressing specifically the duties of a pastor, but whether a diocesan priest has the title of “pastor” or not, he is always a shepherd for God’s People so what is contained in those numbers speaks to every diocesan priest.

The very first duty mentioned is that the Word of God is to be announced in its entirety to the people. As I thought about that I remembered something Karl Rahner wrote years ago. I remember it because it was the only thing I ever read that Karl Rahner wrote that I understood--the first time I read it. It was a sermon he gave at a Mass of Thanksgiving offered by a newly ordained priest. I want to share part of that sermon with you. It’s a rather lengthy quote, but Rahner says it so well: “Remaining man and Christian, he speaks to a glib and garrulous world, a world bubbling over with suave and superficial words. Of course, he himself is one of the effusive, with his plethora of words, mostly wasted. But he believes, and despite his fears he knows that he must communicate God’s word to you. This word is not his own. Nor does he possess it through his own talents or through some special religious interest that beckons him.... No, he comes to you because God has told him to

proclaim God's word. Perhaps he has not entirely understood it himself. Perhaps he adulterates it. Perhaps he falters and stammers. How else could he speak God's word, ordinary man that he is, with his petty wit, his elaborate conceits and his shortsightedness? But must not some one of us say something about God, about eternal life, about the majesty of grace in the heart of our sanctified being; must not some one of us speak of sin, of the judgment and the mercy of God?" Isn't that great?!! My brothers, that is your first priority as a priest. We need to live and pray that word so that we can proclaim it the best we can. It is important to study the scriptures and consult homiletic aids and all those props that are available to us, but we especially need to absorb the word, integrate it, make it our own so that folks do not level against us a criticism I once heard of: "he sounds like he is talking about something second hand." God's word must come from our hearts if it is going to touch the hearts of others.

Interestingly, if you recall what I said about what is fundamental to the SCJs sponsoring this seminary/school of theology, the next duty of the priest that the Code mentions is: "to foster works by which the spirit of the Gospel, including issues of social justice, is promoted..." Talking about issues of social justice in some parishes will not make you very popular. Those issues get at biases and prejudices in ourselves that we are often afraid to admit. They are such a part of the fiber of our being that we act upon without even being consciously aware of them. So when we start to bring folks to an awareness of them, it is not comfortable. When I have to speak about such issues in a situation where I feel there may be great resistance, I make sure I am speaking to myself as well as the rest of the congregation and not standing in judgment above or over them. Something I do that helps me with that is to give my prepared homily to God first. I speak to God about what I want to say to the folks and see if what I want to share is truly of God.

The Code goes on to say that the pastor is to take special care for the Catholic education of children and young adults. It does not say how that is to be done but leaves that to the energy and creativity of each person.

I was touched by the Code's call to "bring the gospel to those who have ceased practicing their religion or who do not profess the true faith." We hear a similar call from our wonderful Pope Francis. He has told us to "get out of our sacristies," to go to the folks, not to wait for them to come to us, but to follow the example of Jesus the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost and puts His life on the line to get them back.

After indicating all those things I have just mentioned, the Code says: "see to it that the Most Holy Eucharist is the center of the parish assembly...." The Eucharist is like a many faceted jewel which has so many aspects to it. Let me highlight just a couple of them. We Catholics believe in the abiding presence of Jesus among us in the Eucharist, but we can take that gift for granted. A friend of mine told me of an incident when a person who did not share our faith was being shown around the parish church. They paused before the tabernacle and the visitor said: "so you Catholics believe that Jesus is truly present here." And the pastor said: "yes, that is what we believe." And the visitor said: "Then where is everybody???" We cannot spend our lives before the Blessed Sacrament, but do we appreciate the gift we have?

Let me refer to number 82 of the Constitutions of the Priests of the Sacred Heart which indicates a

way to have a proper balance in our lives when it comes to reverence for the Eucharist. It reads: "Through our Eucharistic celebration, united with the whole Church in this memorial and present to its Lord, we welcome Him who brings us to live together, who consecrates us to God, and unceasingly throws us back onto the streets of the world in service of the gospel." That says it so well. It helps us to avoid the temptation expressed by Peter after Jesus is transfigured when he says: "Let's build three tents and stay here." Jesus says: no, go back down the mountain to be with the folks. Pope St. John Paul II makes this same point in a very powerful statement in his apostolic letter, "Mane Nobiscum." He says in paragraph 28: "We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged." If the poor are not better off because of our devotion to and celebration of the Eucharist, then our devotion and celebration is not authentic, it is phony. It is empty of the meaning that Jesus intended in giving us this gift. It is not of God.

The Code calls us to a "devout celebration of ...the Sacrament of Reconciliation." Priests need to be aware of the power they have in this Sacrament. People come to us, vulnerable, frightened, overwhelmed. By the way we receive them we can give life or crush it. In Matthew 23: 3-6 Jesus rebukes those who lay heavy burdens on people and do not lift a finger to help them carry life's burdens. We need to be like the Suffering Servant spoken of in Isaiah 42:2-3 who does not "break the bruised reed" or "quench the smoldering wick." We need to nurture life back into those who come to us in such a condition.

When Jesus speaks of himself as the good Shepherd, He says: "I know mine and they know me." That may have been what inspired the authors of the Code to say: "In order to fulfill his office in earnest the pastor should strive to come to know the faithful who have been entrusted to his care...." Pope Francis put it in a very earthy way: "bear the smell of the sheep" he tells us. We need to visit the families, share their cares, their joys and especially their griefs. We probably cannot do anything to change some situations, but we can let folks know they are not alone in what they are going through.

The Code goes on to name groups of people who need our special attention: "have a generous love to help the sick, particularly those close to death...seek out the poor...those exiled from their own land... (What special significance that has for us as we see what is happening in the lives of migrants and refugees in this country and throughout the world.) (finally) labor diligently so that spouses and parents are supported in fulfilling their proper duties...." Those who are dying can often feel abandoned, lonely. They at times have things they want to say and no one wants to listen and let them say what they want to say. When God asked Solomon what gift he wanted, Solomon asked for a "lev shomeh". Most people say he asked for wisdom, but the literal translation of what he asked for is a "listening heart." That is what we can offer those facing death. As for the call to care for those exiled, the writers of the Code in 1983 probably had no idea how pertinent that admonition would be to us in 2015.

I have listed so many different things a priest, a pastor is called to be and do. It is overwhelming. I remember hearing of a person turning in prayer to God and saying: "I cannot do all those things you are asking me to do." God responds: "If I thought you could, I wouldn't have asked you." We need to humbly accept our limitations and give ourselves to God to be blessed and broken and shared like

the few loaves and fish that fed thousands and we find that we are more than enough to go around.

A Belgian priest named Jacques Leclercq wrote a book whose title sums up very well just what a priest is called to be, namely, "Man of God for Others." The priest belongs to and centers his life on God, but he is God's man not for himself or for what he gets out of it. No, He is God's man for God's people and shows his dedication to God by pouring out his life in generous, loving service of God's people. When a priest is ordained that does not mark his having been granted a status that raises him above his brothers and sisters. We need to remember that at the celebration of the first Eucharist, the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of His disciples.

There was a time when priests believed that they had to have a spirituality that could be compared to the way we make use of gas stations. We run our cars till they need more fuel. We tank up and we are off till we need gas again. That concept, that way of living, influenced our way of operating in ministry so that priests would pour themselves into their ministry and then when they were exhausted and running on fumes, as it were, they would stagger back to a place of quiet and prayer and "tank up" so they could then go back "out there" to serve God's people. The second Vatican council adjusted that way of thinking and living. In the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests in paragraph 14 we read: "...priests attain to the unity of their lives by uniting themselves with Christ in acknowledging the Father's will and in the gift of themselves on behalf of the flock committed to them. ...by assuming the role of the Good Shepherd, they will find in the very exercise of pastoral love the bond of priestly perfection which will unify their lives and activities." The unity that the decree is addressing is the unity between their interior spiritual life and their external activities. These are not two different aspects of the priest's life that are running on separate parallel tracks, but rather they are intimately connected. The priest does not have to withdraw from his ministry to become holy. He is sanctified in the very actions of doing the holy things that are his life. Yes, we need to take time for prayer to deepen our relationship with God like any other believer, but God sanctifies us through the ministry we give and through the people with whom and to whom we render service.

Let me make three brief remarks about the laity in the Church. Covering that adequately would require another Dehon Lecture or a class, but I would feel remiss if I did not at least allude to this topic which concludes the items mentioned in that wonderful description of the role of a pastor in Canon 529. 1) The Code calls for the pastor "to acknowledge and promote the proper role which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the Church's mission...." They want to serve and need to be invited and encouraged to do so. We need to trust the folks and embrace their collaboration. 2) My brothers, the folks need our loving care, but we need theirs too. If we lovingly serve God's people, we will receive the support that we need from God through the love of God's people. 3) When we are involved in parish ministry, we need to be mindful of the fact that the parish belongs to the people of that parish. We will be transferred and/or die, but the parish, the people remain. They are God's people, not ours. They are entrusted to our care, just for a while, but ultimately they belong to God and we are God's servants and theirs in their local parishes.

Part II

Now I want to share some thoughts about the ministry of religious who are priests. What is it specifically that priests who are religious are called to bring to their ministry?

Let me repeat what I said at the beginning from that statement issued by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men: “religious clergy, although often enough...exercise ministry in a parish setting, have as their intended ministry the pastoral expression of the charism and mission of their institutes for the sake of the Church.” That is what the life and ministry of religious clergy is to be about. We are not substituting for the shortage of diocesan priests in parishes. Always, in whatever ministry we may be involved in, the ministry of religious clergy is about serving God’s people with the impetus we receive from the charism and spirituality of our particular religious communities.

To organize my thoughts about the ministry of diocesan priests I used the points made in the Code of Canon Law. To develop that key thought expressed in the CMSM statement about what is to characterize the ministry of religious clergy, I want to use some of the significant points that Pope Francis gave us in his letter calling for the year of consecrated life. Pope Francis gave a kind of clarion call to religious to look to the past with gratitude, to live the present with passion and to look to the future with hope. Let me say a bit about each of those phrases because I am hoping that will give us a clearer understanding of how religious clergy live out their intended ministry of giving pastoral expression to the charism and mission of their communities for the sake of the Church.

Look to the past with gratitude!! There is an old saying that indicates a powerful truth: “we stand on the shoulders of giants.” We religious need to know the history of our communities. Listen to the stories of the early members of your communities. Know those heroes and heroines who have left their mark on your community. Those early members made sacrifices from which we are now reaping the benefits. The beginnings were usually small and did not look very promising. In our own province here in the US we look to five members of the German province who came to the United States and started ministering to the Native American peoples on the plains of South Dakota. Five men who came here with nothing but a desire to spread the reign of the love of God symbolized in the pierced heart of Jesus. Very often they scratched out an existence and because they did, we have all that we have today. We have much to be grateful for.

Live the present with passion. A dear friend of mine who is a religious likes to apply to herself an expression that was coined by a woman in leadership in her community, the School Sisters of Saint Francis. She says: “I want to be a woman with a burn about her.” For us to be able to live with that kind of passion something has to start in our mind and then move to our heart. We religious need to really know, understand, grasp the charism, the spirituality of our community. The Gospel that we have received from Jesus is the ultimate rule for every religious order or congregation. That is foundational. But each group lives the Gospel with a certain emphasis. That is the charism we receive from our founder/foundress. The image I like to use in trying to get across the idea of just how the charism, the spirituality affects each religious in the living out of the Gospel message is the image of a pair of glasses. As a religious becomes more and more steeped in his or her knowledge of the charism of the community they see the Gospel of Jesus as it was seen and lived by their founder/foundress. It is as if our founders/foundresses have given us a pair of glasses and it is through the lenses that we have received from them that we read and learn the Gospel. We learn what the Gospel of Jesus meant for the first members of our community and, if we are called to that community, that view, that understanding of the Gospel is transformed from an intellectual grasp of an idea to a heartfelt conviction that sets us on fire and gives us something to live and die for. I am

fond of saying: “I don’t know where being John Czynski ends and being an SCJ starts for me.” The way our founder Father Leo John Dehon read the Gospel just fits and fills me. I found a “home” for what I believe about life, God, Church with the SCJs, the Priests of the Sacred Heart. Maybe you will find a different way to say it, but something like that needs to happen for each religious. Each religious needs to be grabbed by the fire of the founder/foundress of his/her community and live it. That is what marks the ministry of the ordained religious. So in whatever ministry he is involved, be it a parish, a school, a hospital, a social agency, a prison, whatever—he brings to that ministry the special vision, charism that the founder of his community had for advancing the Gospel of Jesus.

Look to the future with hope. Pope Francis mentions the things that are going on that can drag us down: decreasing vocations and aging members in our communities, economic problems because of the global financial crisis, the suffering of persons that screams for us do something about reforming our immigration laws, the horrible wars, that are not called wars, that are destroying lives, the idea that all morality is relative. All of that can drag us down. What gives us hope is what has given the People of God hope through the ages, namely the conviction that God has been with God’s People through the ages, is with us and will continue to sustain us in all that we go through. Our Holy Father is calling upon all religious to be messengers of hope, and so, that element needs to characterize the ministry of priests who are religious. In our culture we say that the optimist sees a glass of water and says it is half full while the pessimist says it is half empty. The person of hope sees a glass that is empty and trusts that God can help us fill it, because nothing is impossible with God. There is a wonderful image given in the book: *The Emergent Self*. The author says that we have too many “basement people” in our lives who drag us down. He says: we need “balcony people” so that as we struggle on the stage of life we can look up and see someone waving his jacket over his head cheering us on. Our Holy Father is calling us to be life-givers in imitation of Jesus who came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Pope Francis then goes on to mention some expectations that he has for the year of Consecrated Life. I want to reflect with you on some of those expectations and how I see those expectations relating to what characterizes the ministry of priests who are members of religious communities.

Interestingly, the very first expectation Pope Francis has of us religious is joy. Some of you will remember the Peanuts cartoons and the character named Lucy. One of the cartoons shows Lucy carrying a sign that says: “The world needs crabby people.” Pope Francis says the world needs joyful people. He says: “we are called to know and show that God is able to fill our hearts to the brim with happiness...” There are all kinds of messages that we see on television that tell us about things we need to be happy. Our Holy Father is asking religious to let their lives and the ministry they are involved in witness to the fact that God is enough and that being in union with God is the only way we find true fulfillment and happiness.

He asks us to live up to the old saying that: “where there are religious, there is joy.”

Another one of those expectations is that Pope Francis is “counting on (us religious) ‘to wake up the world’ since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy.” Prophets are not persons who magically predict the future. Prophets are persons called to speak for God to God’s People. They see reality for what it is and name it and call to conversion. Prophets are not popular people. They tend

to be persecuted and killed. And yet there is a kind of paradox about the response to the prophet. You recall what the gospel says about Herod's reaction to John the Baptist's preaching. Mark 6: 20 "When he (Herod) heard him (John) speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him." What that speaks to for me is the fact that we instinctively know the truth when we hear it and we are drawn to it even though we do not like it. People are made for what is good and true and beautiful and the prophet names what is contrary to that in our lives and draws us to conversion.

Pope Francis goes on to say: "Prophets tend to be on the side of the poor and the powerless, for they know that God ... is on their side." The prophet is the voice for those who have no voice or who are not heard when they do cry out. He also calls us religious to be "the leaven for a society inspired by the Gospel." I like to reflect on that image of being leaven when I get anxious about the smaller number of men and women in religious communities. By its very nature leaven is not something big. It is always something small, but it is powerful and is able to have an effect on the larger mass that surrounds it. But to have that kind of effect Pope Francis says religious must "know God and the men and women who are their brothers and sisters." When Pope Francis talks about "knowing" God and our brothers and sisters I believe he is using that verb the way Jesus uses it when He says He knows the Father and He knows His sheep. That kind of knowing is not about intellectual understanding but rather about loving relationship that leads to intimate union so that He can speak about being one with the Father and with us.

There is another aspect to being a prophet that Pope Francis did not explicitly mention in his letter and that is the fact that prophets question the status quo. I believe he did not write about it because he instinctively does it. After all he is a religious himself. As our Holy Father he is leading us prophetically and showing us that things can be done differently than they have been. He is making us put less stock in the phrase that is at times referred to as "the seven last words," namely: "we have always done it this way."

Another expectation that Pope Francis has for us religious is that we be "experts in communion." That is a characteristic that is to mark the ministry of the religious clergy. We SCJs say about ourselves and I believe every religious community feels the same thing, namely, that we have a spirituality that is lived in community and from that flows our ministry. Let me quote our constitutions numbers 60 and 65: "lived in community our profession of the evangelical counsels is the primary expression of our apostolic life. Through fellowship even above and beyond conflicts, and through mutual forgiveness, we would like to be a sign that the fraternity (the genuine relationships) for which people thirst is possible in Jesus Christ and we would like to be its servants."

That is the way it is stated in the constitutions of Priests of the Sacred Heart. Religious who are here, look at your rules of life, your Constitutions and I am sure that you will find similar statements about your community life.

The message of community is so important for people to hear especially now because of what is going on in our world. Fear and ignorance are driving us apart. Just consider our struggles with racism among and within us. The news media is filled with the struggles and suffering of people as they try to migrate to safety. The advances in technology have made us aware that our world is truly a global village. We are all connected and we need to learn to live together. As religious we experience the

internationality of our own communities. We struggle with the wonders and the woes of living in community with people who are different from us. That is where we are learning to be the “experts in communion” that Pope Francis says we are called to be. Religious clergy bring what they have learned in their everyday lives to the people they serve in ministry. We need to model and witness to community. If those we serve do not see it in our lives, our words calling them to live together lovingly will mean nothing.

We hold as sacred the last words we have heard our loved ones say. Well, when the Johannine community gave us their remembered reflection of some of Jesus’s last words, what we hear Him saying is that we are to love one another and that we be one as He and the Father are one. And He doesn’t just tell us to live that way. He prays for that for us with His Father. Can we wrap our minds around the image of the Son God interceding for this on our behalf with His Father? Religious clergy, called to be experts in communion in their ministry, give their lives to be part of the answer to Jesus’ prayer: “that they be one”. Working for unity, for communion among believers and among all people must be a very strong characteristic of the ministry of religious clergy.

The last expectation of Pope Francis that I want to refer to is his call “to come out of (ourselves) and go forth to the existential peripheries....” He says: “Don’t be closed in on yourselves, don’t be stifled by petty squabbles...a hostage to your own problems. You will find life by giving life, hope by giving hope, love by giving love.” And then he gets very explicit and says: “I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees....” It is as if Pope Francis is saying if working with refugees is not a priority for you now, I am asking you to make it one. That is what our spiritual leader and father is asking of us who are religious. He wants that to be a significant part of our ministry.

Conclusion

As I come to the end of my reflection there are a couple of concluding remarks that I want to make and then tell you a story.

I was asked to reflect on the ministry of diocesan priests and that of clergy who are religious. As I re-read what I have prepared I realized that I was trying to point out what characterizes the ministry of each group. I so feel the need to emphasize that while there are elements that make the ministry of each group different, unique, they are not separate. We are all in this together. St. Paul talks about gifts that differ but all of which contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ, the Church, the People of God. So whether we are among the diocesan clergy or members of a religious community or members of the laity, we each need to know and celebrate and share the gift that the God has made us to be and to give.

After the second Vatican Council there were all kinds of studies done on the priesthood from various points of view. The people who handled the psychological aspect of the study summed up the conclusion of all their work and investigation in a simple powerful sentence. They said: “Priests are ordinary men from whom the extraordinary is expected, especially by themselves.” You know that the folks and we are ourselves can expect so much of ourselves. Many of those expectations are unreal, but what God’s people have a right to expect of us who are called to serve as ordained ministers is that we live as “men of God for others.”

When Pope St. John Paul II visited the United States for the first time, a priest named Father Frank NcNulty, who represented the priests of the United States, told him a story that I want to share with you. It seems that there was a Shakespearean actor who was giving a recital. After he had finished his prepared program of various speeches and so forth, he said that he would accept requests. Various people asked him to give poems and speeches that were favorites of theirs. Then a priest in the group asked him to recite the Good Shepherd psalm. The actor said: "I will do that, Father, if you will recite it after I do." The priest felt somewhat embarrassed, but agreed to do so. The actor rose and gave a stirring rendition of the psalm and the audience burst into applause. The actor smiled and gestured for the priest to come forward and recite the psalm. The priest got up and stood before the audience and recited the psalm. When he finished, there was complete silence and some people were wiping tears from their eyes. The actor came to the front of the audience and said: "I hope you realize what just happened here. You see, I know the psalm. He knows the Shepherd."

My brothers, get to know the Shepherd, and share the One you have come to know and love with God's People. God bless you.