

Opening School Eucharist: 02 SEP 20

What a great joy to see you, gathered here this afternoon for this Eucharist!

[livestreaming]. We've come together, to step forward in faith, so that we may continue on the path the Lord has traced out for us. *¡Bendito sea el Señor! Porque ya es nuestra la salvación, pero su plenitud es todavía objeto de esperanza* (Rm 8:24). Yes! "Bless the Lord, O my soul" (Ps 104:1). For in hope we have been saved and the Spirit has come to the aid of our weakness, as the letter to the Romans reminds us (cf. Rm 8:26).

Even so, I can relate to the image of the dry bones from our first Reading. Ezekiel describes a scene that must have been very fearful: dry bones in every direction (Ez. 37:2). And even as they began to take on flesh, I can imagine he felt a sense of awe and "asombro", as we say in Spanish (stunned astonishment).

Haven't we been living in a state of "stunned astonishment" since mid-March when the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic began? It still threatens us: the infection rate is still too high for us to be able to move into the next phases of our operations plan: phases that would provide us more freedom to be together and support one another, while still adhering, of course, to those practices that would help us overcome the pandemic as well as minimize exposure to the virus. This "asombro" has continued with social and cultural turmoil such as shootings and riots, growing racism, untoward use of force, economic uncertainty, and natural disasters: fires, floods, excessive heat, hurricanes... And even by unexpected personal health issues on top of everything else. It feels so apocalyptic! We are being assailed by so many things!

De Seguro: "...la creación entera gime hasta el presente y sufre dolores de parto, y no solo ella, sino también nosotros..." como nos dice la carta a los romanos (Rm 8:22). "Brothers and sisters: ...all creation is groaning in labor pains...; and not only that, but we ourselves...we also groan within ourselves..." (Rm 8:22). Of course, only a mother, one who has given birth, knows the full reality of these words. But St. Paul's Letter to the Romans says it so well! There are plenty of things we can point to as signs of fear. Obviously, given the text, this is not the first time nature and human beings have gone through this fearful experience.

So, do not give in to fear! The Lord has made a promise to us: "Rivers of living water will flow from within him who believes in me" (Jn 7:38).

Instead look at the signs of hope that are even more powerful! They surround us if we but open our eyes to what the Lord is showing us, like Ezekiel. Some of those signs are so easy to take for granted. For example, so far not one of us has gotten sick from Covid-19. Thank God! Our staff and faculty adjusted and worked diligently, responsibly, creatively, and with great dedication, both remotely and on-campus last spring and through the summer. The SCJs and our in-house seminarians arrived safely and soundly, having all tested negative. The latter took part in a beautiful retreat directed by Fr. Tom Knoebel, that gave a firm spiritual footing to begin the semester. Orientation last week went very smoothly and was well organized. And now classes have begun on campus with very little difficulty, despite the challenges.

Moreover, socially and culturally we hear voices being raised from all sectors recognizing that we have to treat one another better. That things have to change so that all of us can live better lives with respect and dignity. I've been especially amazed by those speaking on behalf of the voiceless, such as owners and athletes of sports teams, wealthy business

moguls, and others who recognize that attending to the common good is not socialism but the fulfillment of the gospel. As Jesus says in today's passage: "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink" (Jn 7:37). *¡Vengan a beber!*

For its not about "me and Jesus," it's about "we and Jesus." That's what Catholic Christianity is all about. That's what it means to "conform our world to the heart of Christ" (SHSST vision statement). That's what it means to "...form missionary disciples, who evangelize, both globally and locally, minds and hearts with the life and light of Jesus Christ" (SHSST mission statement). That's what Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology is all about!

Can you hear the racket? *¿Sienten el barullo?* What is that rattling? Why, it's the dry bones of fear being transformed: "...and the spirit came into them; they came alive and stood upright, a vast army" (Ez 37:10)!

So, hold fast to that passage from Jeremiah that has given us so much hope these past two years, namely: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you" (Jer 29:11-12).

And as the Letter to the Romans tells us: "*El Espíritu nos ayuda en nuestra debilidad, porque nosotros no sabemos pedir lo que nos conviene; pero el Espíritu mismo intercede por nosotros con gemidos que no pueden expresarse con palabras*" (Rm 8:26). Yes, the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness and intercedes on our behalf even with inexpressible groanings. For "...the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the holy ones according to God's will" (Rm 8:27). So don't let your hearts be troubled; the Lord has promised and he will do it (Ez 37:14).