

Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez

Mass for Seminarians and their Families

San Juan del Rio Parish, Saint Johns

December 21, 2020

“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb...”

The waiting of Advent is meant to be a time of increasing joy. And as we get closer to the Nativity of the Lord, the liturgy of the Church intensifies with a climate of *un ambiente*, of the deepest, spiritual childlike awareness of joyful expectation.

Tonight, the seminarians of the Diocese of St. Augustine, Father Steven Zehler, and Michelle Clark, his assistant, who enabled us to gather in this unique annual get together before the Nativity of our Blessed Lord, celebrating our waiting with the Mother and the Child in the womb moving on a journey to Elizabeth’s place.

Let us pay attention to the words of Elizabeth to Mary: Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb...the daily prayer of the Ave Maria of the holy rosary remembers these words as a gentle mantra, said lovingly again and again...

At the Annunciation. To quote Bishop Barron’s commentary of Dec. 20, “The seasons of Advent and Christmas are all about how Mary and Joseph deal with the birth of the Child God.”

Tonight, we are here to recognize with gratitude the role our families play in the awesome gift of the vocation of their adult sons. The birth of the Messiah is told through the story of the holy family of Nazareth. The careful discernment of our seminarians is not unlike Mary’s fiat: how can it be? Or Joseph’s obedience: Joseph son of David do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife...” Each seminarian knows about dealing with doubts, uncertainties and challenges of surrendering our futures vis a vis the mystery of God’s ways and responding or dealing with the mystery with faith and surrender. The school of Nazareth is what seminary formation is all about, a school of prayer, silence, work and community life.

Today I tweeted in appreciation for the contribution of our seminarian’s parents, stating: “in discerning a priestly vocation or any vocation of total consecration, parents and siblings strong support is essential in all stages of decision making in which grace has the greater part to play”...

Grace has the greater part to play, and each seminarian together with his family is invited to gaze deeper in Mary’s heart, her fiat, saying yes to God’s will whatever that will may lead us: “I will whatever you will, I will it because you will it, I will it in the way you will it, I will it for as long as you will it.” (Clement XI, universal prayer).

Relating to Mary all the time: With the joy of the Magnificat, with her solidarity at the Cross, with her apostolic communion with the 12 at the upper room. Yes, let Mary be always present in the splendid journey of an entire beautiful life: of discerning (saying yes to the mystery),

seminarian (persevering in formation), priestly service (faithfulness in loving to the end), making our entire life as John Paul II wished: let your entire life be a Magnificat!

In his last encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucaristia*, the summit of his 14 encyclicals, St. John Paul II at the very end (#54) writes about Mary, the Eucharistic woman. He comments on the words of St. Elizabeth said to Mary: “blessed she who believed.” Mary anticipated in the mystery of the incarnation, the Church’s eucharistic faith. When at the Visitation, she bore in her womb the Word made flesh; she became in some way “a tabernacle”– the first “tabernacle” in history – in which the Son of God, still invisible to our human gaze, allowed himself to be adored by Elizabeth, radiating his light as it were through the eyes and the voice of Mary. And is not the enraptured gaze of Mary as she contemplated the face of the newborn Christ and cradled him in her arms that unparallel model of love which should inspire us every time we receive the Eucharistic communion?