

**Address of H.E. Archbishop Kurian Mathew Vayalunkal,
Apostolic Nuncio to Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands,
to the Seminarians of Holy Spirit Seminary**

Bomana, 9 October 2016

Respected Fr. Rector, Reverend Fathers,
Members of the Seminary staff, and my **dear seminarians**,

It gives me immense joy and hope to be with you today, to spend some hours with you in this House of Formation, which is – in a certain sense – the *pulsing heart* and one of the main *reasons of hope* of the Catholic Church in Papua New Guinea and in Solomon Islands.

As Pope’s Representative in PNG/SI, I bring to you the blessings and greetings of our Holy Father Pope Francis. As you probably know, the Pope himself, along the years of his priesthood, has been a Seminary formator, a professor and a spiritual director, in Argentina. Therefore, he knows by personal experience and treasures very much the central importance of Seminary formation in the life of the Church.

Speaking to the young people, among whom there were thousands of seminarians, in Rio de Janeiro, at the Waterfront of Copacabana, on July 25, 2013, he reminded them about the moment when Jesus called the first disciples to follow him by the shores of Lake Tiberias. And, on the basis of that evangelical passage, he said to them: “Today Christ asks each of us again: Do you want to be my disciple? Do you want to be my friend? Do you want to be a witness to my Gospel?” In the spirit of *The Year of Mercy*, these questions invite us to renew our commitment as Christians.

Today, **my dear friends of Holy Spirit Seminary**, I repeat to you: **Christ calls you**, calls each of us, to be his disciples, his witnesses, the heralds of His Mercy, without any fear, and with great enthusiasm, among our brothers and sisters in this changing and troubled world.

God has an eternal plan for you: “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you*” (Jer 1:5): that is the wonderful beginning of a lifelong relationship with God. This is repeated by Jesus who said to the Apostles, and to all of us, “*You did not choose me, but I chose you*” (Jn 15:16). The greatest and the most important life-transforming-decision you can make is to answer ‘yes’ to the call of God. **And we all are called to repeat our “yes” every day!**

Preparing myself for this meeting, I happened to read the conversation of

Pope Francis with the Seminarians of Pontifical Leonine College of Anagni on April 14, 2014 and I thought I should read some passages for your attention.

Talking to the Seminarians Pope gave the following advice: “The seminary is not a refuge for those who have “psychological problems” or lack the courage “to get on in life”. The seminary is a place where one develops their vocation, gaining an in depth understanding of the Gospel, Confession, the Eucharist and prayer.”

Pope looking into the eyes of the Seminarians continued again: “Dear seminarians, what you are preparing for is not a profession, you are not training to work in a business or a bureaucratic organization.... You are becoming pastors in the image of Jesus, the good pastor. Your aim is to resemble him and act on behalf of him amidst his flock, letting his sheep graze.” Then he spoke about the four “pillars” of seminary learning: “spiritual, intellectual, community and apostolic”. He went on to say: “We respond to this vocation in the same way as the Virgin Mary does to the angel: “How is this possible?” Becoming “good shepherds” in the image of Jesus “is something very great and we are so small.” “Yes, it is true, it is too great; but it is not our work! It is the work of the Holy Spirit, with our collaboration,...It is about humbly giving oneself, like clay that is to be molded, letting God the potter work the clay with fire and water, with the Word and the Holy Spirit.” Then he talk about the gradual discernment and conversion in the seminary life. He said: It is true that “at the beginning intentions are not completely righteous, and it is hard for them to be so”: All of us have had moments when our intentions were not completely righteous, but slowly this changes with everyday conversion. Think of the apostles! Think of James and John. One of them wanted to be prime minister and the other a minister of the economy because it was a more important role. The apostles’ mind was elsewhere but the Lord patiently corrected their intention and in the end the intention of their preaching and martyrdom was incredibly righteous.”

Then once again the Holy Father underlined strongly the importance of strict formation. He said: Being good shepherds means “meditating on the Gospel every day to pass its message on through one’s life and preaching.” It also means experiencing God’s mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.” “It is vital to always go to confession so you can become generous and merciful ministers because you will feel God’s mercy upon you, encouraging you to become generous and merciful ministers.” It means feeding on faith and love of the Eucharist in order to provide nourishment to the Christian people.” “It means being men of prayer so as to become the voice of Christ that praises the Father and constantly intercedes for their brothers.” ***If you are not willing to follow this path***, with these attitudes and these experiences, – and I say this from the heart, without meaning to offend anyone - it is better to have the courage to seek another. There are many ways, in the

Church, to bear Christian witness and there are many paths that lead to the sainthood. Following in Christ's ministry allows no place for mediocrity, who always leads to using the holy people of God to one's own advantage. *Woe to bad shepherds who feed themselves and not their flock!* – the prophets said,” Francis added, quoting Ezekiel. “Woe to bad shepherds because the seminary is not a refuge for the many shortcomings we may have; it is not a refuge for psychological problems or a refuge for those who do not have the courage to go on in life and see the seminary as a place that will defend them. No, that is not what it is. If that is what your seminary was it would become a mortgage for the Church! No, the seminary is there for people to move forward, along this path and when we hear the prophets exclaim the word “Woe” it should lead you to reflect seriously on your future. Pius XI once said it was better to lose a vocation than to risk accepting a candidate who is not sure. He was a mountain climber, he knew about this things.”

The Pope ended his address by entrusting seminarians to the Virgin Mary. “Russian mystics used to say that in moments of spiritual upheaval we must take refuge under the cape of the Holy Mother of God,” Francis said. So we must go out “wearing Mary’s cape.”

His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in his beautiful letter to the seminarians of the year 2010, tells us, “that the most important thing in our path towards priesthood and during the whole of our priestly lives is **our personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.**” (Letter to Seminarians, 2010, No: 1). Pope Francis repeated the same thing on various occasions. Speaking to a group of Seminarians in 2016 he said: “Priests need to have an active, personal relationship with God and live in constant dialogue with his word “or, better, with God who speaks””. According to him, “A priest who is tempted to live the way most people live today “begins to settle for getting some attention, judges his ministry on the basis of his achievements and eases into seeking what he likes – becoming lukewarm and without any real concern for others”. “If a priest chooses to be just a regular person, he will be a priest who is mediocre or worse.”

On the other hand, the Holy Father Francis, in perfect continuity with his beloved Predecessor, in his Homily to the youth that same day in Rio de Janeiro, deepened this fundamental concept, saying: Jesus brings God to us and us to God. With him, our life is transformed and renewed, and we can see reality with new eyes, from Jesus’ standpoint, with his own eyes. For this reason, I say to every one of you today: “**Put on Christ!**” in your life, and you will find a friend in whom you can always trust; “**put on Christ**” and you will see the wings of hope spreading and letting you journey with joy towards the future; “**put on Christ**” and your life will be full of his love; it will be a fruitful life.”

Among these essential ways of welcoming in your life the presence of Jesus, I wish now to draw your attention especially on the most holy sacrament of the real presence of Christ among us, the memorial of his passion, death and resurrection. **The Eucharist** – in fact – is the center of our lives and is the heart of all the sacraments. Pope Benedict XVI – again in the Letter to the Seminarians – tells us that “in the sacraments Jesus gives himself to us in person, through physical realities. **At the heart of our relationship with God and our way of life is the Eucharist.** Celebrating it devoutly, and thus encountering Christ personally, should be the centre of all our days.” (Letter to the Seminarian 2010, No 2).

Never forget, dear seminarians and dear formators, this central role of the Eucharist in Seminary life, priestly life, and in the life of the Church. We need to receive from Christ a *Eucharistic heart*, and a *Eucharistic style of life*! In other words: a *self-giving style of life*, in a spirit of communion, love and unity! Only from the source of the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ present in this divine sacrament, we will be able to receive from Him the grace of imitating Him in a love-centered life, at the service of the Church and of the entire humanity.

There are also other dimensions of your life as seminarians that would deserve to be focused on, like the intellectual and the human development. But they cannot be adequately treated in this my short address. Your formators – I am sure – have already illustrated them to you several times and will continue to do that also in the future. Let me conclude, therefore, with only one last exhortation.

The Church has great expectations from young priests in the work of evangelization and of the **new evangelization**. Almost at the end of this **Year of Mercy**, I encourage you so that in your daily labour, now as seminarians and in the future, hopefully, as priests, rooted in the beauty of the faith and deeply united with Christ, you may be able to bring joyfully and tirelessly **the light of the Gospel** to the world with truth and enthusiasm!

Finally, as I said at the beginning of this address, we live in a troubled world, where peace is always threatened by menaces of war and violence. Let us together invoke **Our Lady Queen of Peace**: may she intercede for all humanity, and especially for those dear populations more in danger because of violence and conflicts, may they find the way of peace and reconciliation, the only one way which can bring progress and better life to all humanity, regardless of religious beliefs and ethnic identities.