

Feast of St. Gregory the Great
Our Lady of Providence Seminary, Providence, RI
1Cor 3:18-23; Lk 5:1-11

“Duc in altum!” This is the command by the Lord in today’s Gospel. “Duc in altum...Go out into the deep” the Lord tells Peter. If you ever get a chance to go to the Holy Land, GO! I had the privilege of leading a pilgrimage there last February, and we stayed in a new pilgrim center in Magdala. The theme of the house is those three words “Duc in altum”. It was also a theme chosen by our Holy Father, St. John Paul the Great, for the Church as it entered the 3rd millennium.

That theme, “duc in altum”, is especially important to us as priests. To explain why, you need to understand a little context. St. Peter is arriving back to the docks after an unsuccessful night of fishing. He’s tired, and probably a bit annoyed. And here comes this carpenter who jumps into his boat, and tried to tell him to go out into the deep waters and drop his nets again. EVERYONE knows, you fish in shallow waters, at night. But Peter is stirred, his heart is moved. He looks into the eyes of this man in his boat, and he sees something special. And so he obeys. He trusts in the Lord, he goes out into the deep, and his nets are filled.

We must be men who aren’t afraid to trust in the Lord, and go out into the deep waters. As priests, and especially as Americans, it is easy to get bogged down in fulfilling tasks. We just need to do things. St. Gregory the Great, one of three popes named great, one other I mentioned a minute ago, said: “I assure you that it is not by faith but by love that you will come to know Him, not by mere conviction, but by action.” Action!

Action is often the theme of our ministry. We want to feed the hungry, cloth the poor, take care of the physically sick. We want to be social workers, we want the Church to be just one of many other social institutions. Why? Because that's night fishing in shallow water. That's easy. Some might even say that we don't really need the Lord to do that kind of work. I'd disagree, but I think you get my point.

To focus simply on action, is to ignore the first part of St. Gregory's quote, that it is by love that we come to know God. In order to learn about love, we must go out into the deep. And during your time in seminary, especially THIS year with limited pastoral opportunities, you need to focus on going into the deep. It's scary. Peter went out into the deep and what happened? He fell before the Lord and said, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Going into the deep requires courage. Go for it! Go into those recesses of your heart and soul with Christ. Go into those wounds with your spiritual director and know that Christ will not depart from you, but rather say "do not be afraid." You guys are blessed with two amazing spiritual directors here at OLP, Fr. Woodhouse and Fr. Sullivan. Use them! Let them help you to grow in that love. Once you grow in love of God, love of Christ, then you can turn it into action, into acts of Charity.

This is essential for us as priests. Why? I already mentioned it, and if you read St. Gregory's office of readings today, you'll see it there. The life of the priest is busy! It's overwhelming. He yearned for the time when he was a monk in a monastery. When he could let his mind be absorbed in prayer. And yet, once he took up pastoral duties, once he took up the

care of the souls of a flock, he finds himself unable to focus his mind on prayer, for “it is concerned with so many matters.” And yet, in that time of pastoral care, he became one of our greatest popes, hence why we call him “the Great”. He made reforms to the Church both spiritual and pastoral that defined the Church as it would be throughout medieval times, lifting it up above the confusing, lawless, chaotic Church that existed before his reign. He was able to do it because he had that time in the monastery. He knew the love of Christ, he had taken the instruction of Jesus and had gone out into the deep.

So I challenge you brothers. Don't waste your time here. There is a reason seminary is like a monastery, with a horarium and spiritual directors, etc... It is a place to go out into the deep. Fr. Murphy always says, and I agree with him, that any man who comes into the seminary and fully engages in the program, whether he becomes a priest or not, leaves this place a better man. A man more in love with Christ, more in love with himself, and thus more able to love his brothers and sisters. So I highly encourage you brothers, “duc in altum!” Take the plunge! Go out into the deep!