Father Hurst Farewell

Vespers

St. Mary’s Seminary and University

21 IV 2016

1. **Introduction**
2. **Father Witherup, members of the General Council, Father Kemper and your fellow Provincials, Chorbishop Beggiani, Fr. Hurst, Fr. Leavitt,**

**dear brother priests and deacons, religious women and men, alumni,**

**David Kinkopf, Trustees and benefactors, members of the faculty and staff,**

**and most of all, dear seminarians and students:**

1. **We’ve gathered this night to bid farewell to Father Thomas Hurst,**

**who, for the past nine years, has served so ably**

**as President-Rector of St. Mary’s Seminary and University.**

**Homilies such as this, of course, can easily turn into canonizations**

**and while we all believe Father Hurst to be a holy priest**

**canonizations are well above my pay grade.**

**Instead, I’ll take my cues from the homily of my predecessor, Cardinal Edwin O’Brien,**

**on the occasion of Father Hurst’s installation as Rector, November 30th, 2007.**

1. **On that occasion, the homilist referred to you, Father Hurst,**

**as “a spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual leader” qualified in every sense**

**to serve as the Rector of this, the nation’s oldest seminary.**

**Time and experience have proven the truth and wisdom of my predecessor’s words,**

**so please allow me to address briefly these three aspects of your leadership:**

**spiritual, pastoral, and intellectual.**

**And if I refer to you, Father Hurst, in the third person throughout this homily**

**please accept my apologies in advance; let me assure you, this is not a eulogy!**

1. **Spiritual Leadership**
2. **We cannot think about Father Hurst’s spiritual leadership**

**without, at the same time, reflecting on the spirituality of Father Jean-Jacques Olier,**

**for Father Hurst is a devoted spiritual son of the founder of the Society of San Sulpice.**

**Although Father Olier is not yet a canonized saint**

**we can take Frederick William Faber at his word when he said,**

**“Of all the un-canonized servants of God whose lives I have read,**

**he most resembles a canonized saint…”**

1. **Many in this chapel know better than I that Father Olier was a leader**

**in what is called the French School of Spirituality –**

**a deeply biblical and realistic approach to the spiritual life,**

**based on the liturgy, mental prayer, and the development of Christ-like virtues.**

**Father Olier and the entire French school of spirituality took their cue from St. Paul**

**who taught that God predestined us**

**to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29).**

**According to Father Olier we are conformed to the image of Christ**

**by participating in the mysteries of the life of Christ through the sacraments**

**which, if received worthily, lead to an inner conformity to the Savior.**

1. **Steeped in the Scriptures, the living Word of God and Patristics,**

**a practitioner of *lectio divina* and mental prayer,**

**Father Hurst, strives to live the mystery of Christ he proclaims.**

**As priest, spiritual director, professor, and rector**

**he has helped many seminarians to be conformed to the mysteries**

**that they would celebrate with and for the People of God.**

**He has imparted to them a sturdy spirituality and sturdy habits of prayer**

**essential for busy parish priests facing multiple and incessant demands.**

**At the same time, Father Hurst has anchored the Ecumenical Institute**

**in the universal call to holiness imparted through the Sacrament of Baptism,**

**making growth in spirituality a hallmark of this institution – how grateful we are!**

1. **Pastoral Leadership**
2. **Father Olier’s path to pastoral leadership was not the easiest.**

**Even as he came from a prominent family and was intellectually gifted,**

**so also he underwent challenging periods of spiritual purification and integration.**

**Yet, mentored by St. Vincent de Paul and overshadowed by the Holy Spirit,**

**Father Olier came to place himself entirely at the service of the Church’s mission**

**by engaging in parish work and, of course, seminary formation.**

1. **Everywhere Father Hurst has been stationed,**

**he has generously assisted in what he calls “weekend pastoral duties”;**

**his generous pastoral assistance is fondly remembered and greatly appreciated,**

**most especially the thoughtful preaching of God’s word**

**the reverent celebration of the liturgy, and his friendly pastoral manner.**

1. **In his pastoral generosity and in his role as rector and spiritual director,**

**Father Hurst has helped to form many seminarians to be men of pastoral charity,**

**dedicated to the Church’s mission of evangelization.**

**He has shown them the link between progress in prayer, virtue, & an apostolic spirit.**

**In a time of changing pastoral needs, he has offered to those in formation**

**the guidance of steady a pastoral hand, imbued with prayer and scholarship**

**always tempered by prudence & plain old common sense–the rarest of commodities!**

**He has helped students to grow in their appreciation**

**of other Christian traditions and to appreciate the diversity of pastoral situations**

**they are likely to encounter in ministry.**

**Father Hurst has helped bishops and priests to develop their pastoral skills**

**through the Center for Continuing Formation and by presentations to diocesan priests,**

**such as his talk on preaching the lectionary**

**at a priest convocation in the Diocese of Bridgeport in 2002; I remember it well!**

1. **Intellectual Leadership**
2. **We might recall that Father Olier lived in a time of intellectual ferment**

**when modernity, even as we still know it, was emerging,**

**along with the gradual development of the modern state.**

**It was also a time when the decrees of the Council of Trent on seminary formation**

**were just beginning to be worked out in their practicalities.**

**Amid this heady mix of ferment and change,**

**Father Olier helped to develop the intellectual underpinnings of a bold spirituality**

**and he was a pioneer in developing a program of priestly formation**

**which continues to command our attention.**

1. **A young Father Hurst came of age amid the intellectual and pastoral ferment**

**that marked the latter part of the twentieth century,**

**including remarkable growth in biblical and patristic scholarship,**

**crucial for the vision of the II Vatican Council.**

**Many of his contemporaries evinced a certain enthusiasm for theological trends**

**but not many of them – actually none of them – developed expertise in Syriac!**

**His facility with Semitic languages paved the way for original scholarship**

**and contributed to the understanding of Scripture and Patristics.**

**Yet his intellectual leadership is not confined to a narrow specialty**

**but rather to the range of theology and culture**

**with which church leaders need to be conversant.**

1. **At the same time, both as Rector of Theological College and Saint Mary’s,**

**he has contributed to the understanding of priestly formation,**

**especially the development of the U.S. Bishops’ *Program of Priestly Formation***

**which continues to serve well the Church in the United States.**

1. **Conclusion**
2. **So, tonight, Father Hurst, we your co-workers, students, and friends have gathered**

**to express our very deep appreciation for your ministry among us,**

**to thank you for your splendid service to St. Mary’s Seminary and University,**

**and to ask for you God’s choicest blessings as you take a well-earned rest**

**and continue to share with the Church the many gifts God has given you.**

**We thank you above all for your practice of pastoral charity**

**which has unified the many different aspects of this seminary and university**

**and has helped seminarians, priests, and laity alike to achieve in their lives**

**that balance and harmony so essential for true holiness (cf. PDV, 23).**

1. **May Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in you and all of us**

**to the glory of God and for the salvation of souls, *ad multos annos*!**