



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

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FR. JUSTIN KELLY S.J.
FROM VATICAN II TO POPE FRANCIS
SS. SIMON & JUDE
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Introduction

Bishop Tom Gumbleton

Good afternoon and welcome to another presentation of the Elephants in the Living Room. In preparation for today, I was reflecting on Luke's Gospel. You may remember the 4th chapter, how Jesus comes back from the desert, and goes into the synagogue, and reads Isaiah, and then preaches; and everybody is cheering him on. But then, just a few days later, his family, neighbors turn against him. They push him out of the village, over to the brow of the hill. They're going to kill him. And that is when Jesus proclaims the words that we are familiar with: "No prophet is honored in his own country." And he slips away and escapes death at that point. Well, there's always an exception that proves the rule, and our exception today is Fr. Justin Kelly. He's a local prophet, and so far nobody has tried to push him over any hill; (*laughter*) and I think all of his friends are here. So it won't happen today, Justin; you can be sure of that.



But Justin comes to us from the University of Detroit. He's taught there since 1972, a very popular teacher. He also has taught classes at other universities, Georgetown for a while in Washington, Gonzaga in Spokane, Washington, and also at the Woodstock Theological Seminary in Maryland. Justin also was taught by a couple of very famous people: John Courtney Murray and Avery Dulles, both of whom were experts or *periti* at the Vatican Council. Justin, besides his theological degrees, received a PhD in Literature from Yale University. He was ordained in Detroit by John Cardinal Dearden in 1966; and it was after that, in '72, that he began to teach at the University of Detroit. He teaches seminars occasionally at Manresa, the Jesuit Spirituality and Retreat Center here in the Archdiocese, seminars on spirituality. He's been a long-time member of various societies connected with his teaching work: The Catholic Theological Society of America, The American Academy of Religious Studies, and also he is a member of the Jane Austen Society of North America. That reflects, of course, his interest and skills in literature.

He's written many articles in various journals, and perhaps the most well know of those journals is one that appears in England called *The Way*; and his articles usually deal with spirituality and spiritual growth. Besides all of his academic work, Justin (and this may be a surprise to some of you) is kind of a social activist. I don't know if he accepts that title or not, but he is; and I had personal experience of this. One of the issues that he got involved in, back in 2004, was the issue of Proposal 2. It was an initiative in the State that was to make it unconstitutional—we were going to change our State Constitution to prevent civil unions or same-sex marriages. And, of course, the Catholic bishops of the United States had taken a strong stand in favor of that initiative. Well, Justin organizes a letter for people to sign; and over 100 people signed it; and he sent it to the Detroit Free Press; and they published it. And the letter is urging people to vote against this proposal that would change our constitution. Well, when the letter appeared, there were two names: his name and my name (*laughter and applause*) . Well, within about 48 hours, I had an invitation to go to Washington, D.C. and to visit the Papal Nuncio, which I did. And we had a long discussion; and I came out okay, nothing negative happened. And so I wasn't upset by it at all. In fact, ever since then, I've been grateful to Justin for providing me with an all expense paid trip to Washington (*laughter*) . So his social activism is still part of his life, but so far he hasn't gotten me in trouble again.

At this point I want to remind you that Justin will share with us his insights and experiences as a member of the Church and a teacher within the Church over the past 50 years since the Vatican Council. He's going to share with us his experiences and his understanding of what has been happening, is happening and, we hope, will happen in the Church since the Vatican Council. So I ask you to welcome Justin to speak to us today. (*Applause*)

I'm delighted to be here with my fellow Elephants this afternoon; and it was in fact, I think, on my first visit to this church that I brought the statement which the Elephants debated and edited and was subsequently published in the Free Press challenging Proposal 2. Of course, you know what happened; that the proposal was voted in, and became part of the constitution. We objected to it, among other reasons, because we feared it might be used to deny partner benefits to gay couples and others; and of course we were told that that was not its intention, that won't happen. Well, of course, as soon as it went in, that is exactly what



happened. And now, of course, the U. S. Supreme Court has invalidated all those constitutional changes, so anyways, it's an interesting little bit of history. I'm glad Tom doesn't hold me responsible for his personal discussion with the apostolic delegate. As I recall, his version of the story that he told me was that he went through the delegate's place, where Cardinal Maida was also present, and the delegate asked him, "What are you doing challenging Catholic teaching?" And he said, "I'm not challenging Catholic teaching; in fact, I am reaffirming the Church's social teaching." And the apostolic delegate apparently said something in effect, "Oh, I never thought of that." (*laughter*). If that's not right, at least it's a good story. Anyway, I am most pleased to be here with you this afternoon.

I have a text which runs to very many pages and includes a lot of things that I don't think I will try to say here. So I will try to skip around with some things; and if you sense a certain incoherence, it's not your fault. (*laughter*) I feel honored, of course, to be invited to this distinguished group. I've attended many presentations over the years from people like Sr. Elizabeth Johnson, Fr. John O'Malley, Sr. Helen Prejean, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson from Australia, Dr. Gary Macy, Sr. Theresa Kane and most recently Brother Guy Consolmagno and Robert Mickens, to name just a few. And I feel somewhat overwhelmed to be in their company. A few years ago I was staying at America House in New York to attend the funeral of my teacher and mentor and friend, Fr. Avery Dulles; and I was riding up in the elevator; and a Jesuit, whom I didn't know, got on; and we introduced ourselves to each other; and he asked me, "Are you famous?" I was somewhat taken aback by this, and I said, "Gee I don't think so. If I am, nobody ever told me." (*laughter*) I suppose he was used to famous people riding up in the elevator.

As Tom mentioned I was ordained 50 years ago this year, one year after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council that did so much to reshape the Church that many of us grew up in. And I'd like to share this afternoon some memories of that earlier era, along with some things that I've learned through my half century of priestly ministry. I hope to trace some of the ways, a few of the ways, the Church has changed over that period, and to talk about ways in which it needs to change still further. The papacy of Pope Francis has given me hope: a promise of spring at the end of a long wintry period. And without idealizing or having unrealistic expectations, the mere fact of some life stirring in our ecclesial neighborhood is exciting to behold. The Spirit is alive. Alleluia!

Not everyone, of course, is equally excited and inspired by Francis and his program of reform. For some it is a frightening prospect. In October the conservative Catholic columnist, Ross Douthat, wrote an op-ed piece in the New York Times titled, *The Plot to Change the Church*. The chief agent behind this dastardly plot according to Douthat was none other than, you guessed it, Pope Francis. In suggesting that the Church can and should alter its policies toward divorced and remarried Catholics, admitting them to the sacraments, he was threatening not just to modify the Church's practice, but horror of horrors, to change its doctrine. This was something in Douthat's view that the Church absolutely should not, and could not do. He concluded by declaring that in a situation where the pope and the historic Church were at odds, his bet was on the historic Church. Take that Pope Francis! Now several possible responses to this one might be simply to note that what Douthat calls the historic Church is not in fact the historical Church, which far from being the changeless monolith of immutable doctrine he seems to imagine, is an institution that's been changing since the day of Pentecost, continually meeting new challenges and re-interpreting it's understanding of itself in the light of them.

Nearly all biblical scholars agree that Jesus, in his own lifetime, proclaimed the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God, whereas the post-resurrection community made Jesus himself the center of its message. It declared that the kingdom Jesus had announced had actually arrived when he died and was raised; and it continued and became present in his body, the Church. Arguably, there's a very real continuity between the message of Jesus and the message about him; but the discontinuity, the change of focus, is no less obvious. And likewise, when the Son of Man did not return as speedily as the first Christians expected, the post Pauline pastoral letters in the New Testament reinterpreted his second coming in terms of a cosmic Christ, who holds all things, past, present and future together in unity. Again, we see continuity within change and change within continuity. And a similar pattern persists in the whole history of the Church, culminating in the Second Vatican Council's reversal of several centuries of people teaching when it proclaimed the authority and sanctity of the individual conscience, now whether that is completely in agreement with Church teaching or not.

It is worth asking why Douthat, and others like him, are so threatened by the prospect of doctrinal change. We old Catholics grew up, of course, with the myth of the changeless Church and of the pope as the living mouthpiece of God on earth. One of my most vivid memories of the post-conciliar era was when I was living in a rectory in New Haven during my graduate studies at Yale; and a man came in looking for a birth certificate; and the pastor being away, I offered to fill it out for him. This was a year or so after Pope Paul VI had published *Humani Vitae*, the document reasserting earlier condemnations of artificial birth control. Suspecting correctly that my certificate seeker, well he asked me what I thought about the encyclical, and suspecting correctly that he wanted to tell me what he thought, I asked his opinion. He replied, "Well Father, after all he is the Supreme Pontiff you know, the Supreme Pontiff. Well, he kept repeating, Supreme Pontiff, in a sing-song voice, which made me think that it seemed to have a magical significance for him. It was pretty far removed from any theology of the Petrine office that I had learned in school. But I did think that pointing out that *pontifus maximus* literally meant, "the greatest bridge builder," and was originally a title of the Roman Emperor, didn't seem likely to change his mind very much. So I just filled out the certificate, and he went on his way, his faith, I trust, blissfully unchanged. (laughter) This, no doubt, was an extreme form of an outlook that was once common among Catholics.

Some significant changes in the world view from Vatican II

A part of the belief that what made us different from the Protestants was that we preserved unaltered the faith of the primitive Church, and the pope himself was a kind of divine oracle. It was part and parcel of a whole world view concerning God, Christ, the Church, the priesthood, and the purpose of life on earth. I have gradually moved away from some of that idea; and at Vatican II the Church herself officially made significant changes, I think, in that view of things. And I have somewhere here, maybe not right in front of me, maybe a list of some of the more important items that were mentioned at Vatican II. Here it is:

- For instance, the Church made a shift, including a more positive attitude toward other Christian denominations, and to non-Christian religions, especially Judaism, and to the modern world in general.
- It was a recognition that the spirit of God operates outside the formal boundaries of the Church with its doctrines, hierarchy and sacraments, also within it, of course; a declaration that the Church is the whole people of God, not just the pope and the bishops.
- An affirmation of the primacy of the individual conscience in moral and religious matters, and a more humble less triumphalistic vision of the role of the Church and its service of the world.

Taken together, these constitute a different way of thinking and believing about human life and our relationship to God, although one strongly rooted in the bible and in Catholic tradition, a view more imminent and less transcendent, more open and less defensive, more trustful and less fearful, more committed to improving the well-being of humans in this world with less emphasis on gaining merit and avoiding punishment in the next world. It speaks more of grace and less of sin, though not all the bishops at the council were aware of all these implications, let alone fully embraced them; but the majority saw the need for real change.

Growing into priesthood during this time of change.

Rather than go on about the changes in the Church, I'd like to tell you about my own experience of growing into priesthood during this time of change. When I entered the Jesuit order at the age of 17, I had very little desire to become a priest, or even a clear idea of what it entailed. Though I had been inspired by some very fine priests in our local parish, Fr. Ralph McMonagle; in particular, a gentle, wise and saintly man who had succeeded as pastor, a rather pompous older priest, who held a doctorate in canon law, and insisted on being called Doctor. And I also was inspired by some fine priests who taught me at the Marianist high school I attended. I've sometimes told people that I wanted to get a good Marianist education before the Jesuits got hold of me. I still had only a rather vague idea of what priests did beyond saying Mass and hearing confessions, neither of which seemed very exciting. I felt called to be a Jesuit, to study and to teach; and if that entailed being ordained, so be it. My attitude was perhaps similar to that of a rather plain spoken Jesuit lay brother, now many years deceased, Val Lutertick. On being asked why he became a Jesuit said, "I entered the order to save my fricking soul." (laughter) Although I don't think he said, "fricking." It was a common Catholic attitude in those days.

I think it had been impressed on us in grade school and beyond that the main business of life was to get to heaven and to avoid going to the other place; and religious were supposed to have a virtual guarantee of a ticket to paradise. After all, we had given up marriage and a family, along with many ordinary pleasures of life, and so could be confident that God would reward us for our good behavior, maybe even passing us a "get out of purgatory free card." It seemed like a good deal. I am deliberately parodying something here that in its own time and place was deeply meaningful, not only for me, but for many others.

At any rate I entered the novitiate and proceeded on to the regular course of studies. Two years after the novitiate of liberal arts in the juniorate of philosophy at Wiesbaden, studied in Latin, two or three more years teaching high school during regency, followed by four years of theology, with ordination coming at the end of the third year, and then another novitiate type year called tertianship after that. From the time of entrance to priestly orders, at least a dozen

years of preparation lay ahead of me, and a couple more, before I would be let loose on the world. Time enough I thought to go into whatever ministry priesthood entailed. I wasn't in a hurry. Meanwhile, of course, the role of the priest and of the Catholic Church itself was changing. By the time I began my theology studies at Woodstock College in Maryland in 1963, Vatican II was well underway. And as Tom mentioned in his introduction, several of my professors were *periti*, theological experts, invited to accompany and advise bishops at the Council. During my last year of regency at St. Ignatius High in Cleveland, the first Xavier Rynne's letters from Vatican City published in the *New Yorker* was read aloud during dinner at our refectory; and it exposed to our previously innocent ears some of the tensions, even conflicts, between the Council's more progressive bishops and the papal curia, which never approved Pope John XXIII's idea of calling a council in the first place. The immutable Church of Pope Pius XII was given way to something more fluid and more challenging. The very definition of priesthood was up for grabs. By the time the 4th session of the Vatican Council ended in 1965:

- The altar had been turned around so that the priest faced the people.
- The liturgy had begun to be celebrated in the vernacular.
- The ancient order of deacons had been restored to carry out some of the duties formerly confined to priests.
- And dozens of other changes were in the works.

It was an exciting time to become a priest, but also one full of uncertainty. What would happen next? Where would it all lead? I was ordained with nine other members of the Detroit Province of the Jesuits by then Archbishop Dearden in June of 1966 at Colombiere College in Clarkston, now Colombiere Center. Dearden had been present at the Council and was profoundly changed by it. He was no longer called "Iron John" as he had been when he was bishop in Pittsburgh. Coincidentally, his nephew was part of my homeroom class back in Cleveland. Many years later I attend a retirement dinner for him at Sacred Heart Seminary, thrown by the priests of the Archdiocese; and the affection his clergy had for him was palpable, you could feel it in the air. I don't belong to the Archdiocese and clergy, but I doubt that his successors have inspired in everybody the same deeply felt devotion.

I'd done the usual preparation for being ordained, learning how to say Mass and hear confessions. The Mass saying turned out to be harder than I imagined, although I had been attending daily Mass since entering the novitiate. The bulk of the liturgy was still in Latin, and there were lots of little details to get right: how to hold your fingers at certain points, how to remove the chalice veil, and what parts of the Mass were said out loud, and which ones were whispered, and so on. Like other ordinates I had to pass a Mass examination, a practice session overseen by one of the faculty at Woodstock. My own observer and critic happened to be the Reverend Joseph Fitzmeyer, a world renowned biblical scholar.

I nervously went through all the motions under his observant eye; and when it was all over, he said, "Well, well, I suppose it was valid, but it certainly wasn't very elegant." Believe me, elegance was the furthest thing from my mind. *(laughter)*

Having had Fitz in class, I'm sure he must've hated doing this chore, which took him away from his researches and entomologies of Melchizedek, and other things closer to his heart. In those days of the pre-Vatican II era, the priest celebration of the holy sacrifice of the Mass was passably understood, more than anything else, an exercise in obedience. The important thing was to say all the right words in the right order, perform the gestures according to the prescribed form, neither adding to them, nor subtracting from them. Asking what affect all of this was to have on a congregation or even on the priest himself was a very secondary issue. What God presumably required was that everything should be done precisely and correctly. The number of sins one could commit by deviating from the official ritual was vast. It sometimes seemed as if Jesus had established the Eucharist chiefly to multiply occasions for sinning. *(laughter)* I recall one handbook of moral theology said that if the consecrated elements, the blessed bread and wine, remained on the purificator on the corporal on the center of the altar, that was good and proper. If you moved them halfway to the end of the altar, that was a venial sin. And if you went all the way to the end, that was a mortal sin. *(laughter)* No one said this in so many words, of course, but the anxiety it fostered, which was painfully apparent in the scruples of many poor priests for whom pronouncing the words of institution correctly became a terrible ordeal was obvious. I remember hearing priests saying, "Hoc...hoc...hoc... est...est...est...". They really struggled with it. Conversely, it also led to priests rushing through the Mass prayers at breakneck speed, since as long as you got them all in, it didn't matter how you said them. Nevertheless, as a seminarian I deeply appreciated priests who said Mass with evident devotion; and I hoped to be one of them when my time came.

All of this began to change with the liturgical reforms that flowed from Vatican II. Turning the altar around and having the priest face the congregation made for a different gestalt. The vertical orientation of the Mass as a service directed upward to God became a horizontal one directed outward to the people of God; and it became a celebration of the presence of Christ in the midst of the community. This encouraged a different, less rule obsessed style. In my tertianship in England I came across a book by Josef Jungmann, a famous historian of the liturgy; and I read in it how the third century pope, Hippolytus, had sent around to his diocese a text for use during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He accompanied it with a letter that said in effect, "Here are some prayers you could use when celebrating Mass. Now, you won't want to use these exact words, but as long as you say something like this, it will be okay." What a different idea of papal direction. I found when I got out into the community that I really loved celebrating Mass.

I guess I have a good memory for verbal formulas, part of being a literature buff, I guess, and could easily commit to memory not only the four official canons but some other experimental versions, like the common Dutch canon of *Huub Oosterhuis*, and this made possible a certain freedom of expression and ability to adapt the form, while staying within traditional parameters. In other words I felt able to pray the Mass and not merely to read it. And it clearly made things more meaningful for the congregation when I did this. It seems to me the liturgical prayers that were imposed on us a few years ago by the hierarchy mainly do the opposite. It seems to me an attempt to be faithful to the letter of the Latin text, they produced something both unidiomatic and unprayable.

Another thing, becoming ordained involved was of course learning to preach. Hard as this is to believe today, we were given no course in homiletics as part of our seminary training. And my fourth year at Woodstock, after ordination, we were sent out many weekends to help out at various Baltimore parishes. I remember how difficult I found it to come up with homilies on the Sunday readings. Those I gave probably had a very intellectual cast. I was still in the midst of my theology studies, and I recall getting a letter one time after returning to Woodstock, after a weekend in a parish, from an appreciative, I think, parishioner who thanked me for my lecture. (laughter) I gradually learned to make them a little less lecture-like, knowing that this was not what a homily was supposed to be. A few years later, when I was leaving New Haven for Detroit, a woman parishioner in a parish I had served on weekends thanked me for my ministry there and said my sermons had been very good. She said, "But, you know, of all the good things you said over the years, the one I most remember was the story about two squirrels." I remembered it too.

One Sunday desperate for a way to address the readings in the lectionary I described to the congregation something that had happened to me during the previous week. I'd taken my bicycle out to East Rock Park where a little stream flowed through some woods. It was a lovely fall day, and I stopped to admire the autumn leaves, leaving my bike against the one end of a little footbridge over the stream. Suddenly a squirrel appeared at the other end of the bridge, hopped his way across, and stopped about ten feet away from me. He sat up on his hind legs, and put one paw on his chest, and looked at me, and I looked at him, and neither of us said anything. After a moment or two the squirrel climbed up on one rail of the bridge to see if he could get off that way without coming by me; but a recent rain had made the stream quite full, and he decided it was not his day to swim. So he came back to the center and again sat up and looked at me. Then he tried getting up on the other rail, and looking down at the rushing water with the same result. He returned to his original position and we looked at each other. About this time I saw another squirrel get on the bridge at the far end. He too hippity hopped his way across, came up abreast of the first squirrel, stopped and sat up, one paw across his chest.

So there were two of them there, like bookends - this really happened by the way - anyway, the second squirrel decided after a brief inspection that I was much too big and clumsy, especially encumbered by my bike, to give him any serious trouble. So he got down on all fours, hippity hopped to my end of the bridge, and then took off running as soon as his hind legs touched the last plank. He vanished into the underbrush. I might just have touched the tip of his tail as he flashed by me. This left the first squirrel sitting as before in mid-bridge. Now I don't know if squirrels can look sheepish, but he did seem a bit embarrassed. A second or two later he too got down on all fours and with a nonchalant air, hopped to the end where I was standing, exiting the bridge. He didn't even bother to run; he simply sashayed up the path and went on his way. What moral, you may ask, did I derive from this for my homily? *(laughter)* I don't exactly remember; and it probably doesn't matter. I've used it more than once on many other occasions, and it seems to say something like this: continue on in the direction you were going, obstacles that seem overwhelming at a distance often shrink to manageable size close up. And trust the power that brought you this far will see you the rest of the way.

I'm trusting in that power in this talk by the way. *(laughter)* My parishioner remembered this story and as with the parables of Jesus it probably conveyed its own meaning to her long after everything else I said was forgotten. Odds are this is the part of my talk you will remember if you remember any of it. *(laughter)* I only wish I had more stories like this.

One of the many privileges of my life, and I think all priestly life, has been the opportunity to meditate powerfully on the Sunday readings, particularly the gospels, and to immerse myself in them in order to communicate their meaning to a congregation. I still don't do it very well, I'm afraid. Knowing the essential elements of a good homily is no guarantee of being able to give one. However, I do my best; and we have a little community at the university made up of people who have been coming there for Mass for decades, some of them, some of them, are here today. And I attend the Mass in our chapel even on Sunday when I'm not the celebrant. The fellow Jesuit who takes the service on the alternate weekends is a really gifted homilist; and I often feel quite inadequate in comparison with him. I must have expressed this in a homily of my own one Sunday; because, as I was going around the congregation giving the greeting of peace, one of our parishioners, a woman in her 50s, gave me a surprising compliment. She said, "John," she said, (the other priest) "is interesting; you are inspiring." I guess I'd like to be interesting too, but I'll settle for inspiration when it comes. *(laughter)* The role of the preacher, I think, like that of the prophet is to make God present to the congregation, to take ancient text and bring them to life in the here and now, so that they have an impact on people's lives.

Jesus in the gospels displays an extraordinary ability to do just that. People encountered the living God of the Hebrew Scriptures in all that he said and did. It is a challenging and awesome responsibility; and a life of prayer that keeps the priest in touch with God's spirit; and it is an indispensable part of being able to do it.

I mentioned confession as part of the priestly ministry I was prepared for, or in some ways not prepared for. At the time I was ordained it was taken for granted that a good deal of the priest's life, on weekends at least, if he was working in a parish, would be devoted to hearing confessions. This meant at the time sitting in a confessional box surrounded by thick, hopefully soundproof curtains for several hours on Saturday afternoon and sometimes evening, listening to people as people came in one by one to confess their sins and giving them absolution. Other than a bit of canon law on the subject of reserved sins, and a practicum in which seminarians dealt with cases collected over the years involving complex and difficult situations, there was very little real preparation for just hearing confessions. I think I expected it to be mostly routine and boring, as people came in with laundry lists of minor offenses: swearing, telling small lies, missing Mass on Sunday, and so on. And some did. I remember a woman who came in and confessed missing Mass; when I asked if she had a reason for missing Mass, she said she was having a baby. *(laughter)* Also when you heard nuns confessions, someone once described the experience as like being stoned to death with popcorn. *(laughter)*

But to my surprise, when I actually began to do this in various Baltimore parishes, it proved to be anything but boring. It was often an intensely emotional experience as people shared their personal struggles and sought guidance as well as forgiveness. You never knew when you slide back the wooden panel covering the grill exactly what was going to meet you on the other side. I couldn't help but be deeply touched and inspired by the faith of people who accepted me, a priest still wet behind the ears fresh out of the seminary, as an instrument of God in their lives. It's a humbling and inspiring experience; and, I suspect, all priests share it. It made the life of study, in which I was still engaged, feel like cardboard in comparison. Also, it introduced me to aspects of life I had read about but had not encountered yet in real life.

I recall how startled I was when a woman in a small rural parish in Pennsylvania, where I was helping out one weekend, confessed to adultery. Somehow, in my naiveté, I didn't think good Catholics actually did things like that. My surprise must have shown in my voice, because she urged me not to speak so loudly. Other people in the pews waiting for confession might hear. And she also seemed taken aback, and not very pleased, when I gave her a whole rosary to say, instead of the usual three Hail Mary's as a penance.

Another incident occurred the following year in my tertianship in England, when I was assisting at a parish during Holy Week, in a red brick industrial town not far from Liverpool. The parish was heavily Irish; and, I suppose, I shouldn't have been surprised when one man with a thick brogue, having finished his confession, said that he wanted to take "the pledge." I probably said, "fine," or something like that. I could tell by his reaction that he expected more of me. "Do you want me to lead you in the pledge?" I asked. "Yes, Father, that's what I'd like," he said. What do I do now? This did not come up in the handbook of priest craft. I knew the pledge was about swearing off alcohol, but in what form? and for how long? I had no idea. So, I began hastily translating from the Latin of my Jesuit vow formula, which I knew by heart. "Almighty everlasting God—he repeats—I solemnly swear—he repeats—before the Blessed Virgin Mary—he —and the whole heavenly court" - he repeats. Anyway, I went through these baroque phrases and wondered how am I going to get this guy out of it without vows of poverty, chastity and obedience? (*laughter*) I think it was a little more than he was in for. Anyway, I slipped in the right words at the appropriate part; and I must have succeeded, because he went away seemingly satisfied. Two more men came in, one after another, with the same request; and by the time I finished with the third one, I felt like an expert. I wonder if they got together afterwards over sarsaparilla at some local pub and discussed the odd form of the pledge that the priest, that American fellow, had given them. The Latin phrase, *ecclesia supplant*, the Church supplies the formula, I learned in canon law classes, one I've invoked very often in priestly ministry.

Now, as you know, one of the major changes in Catholic behavior since Vatican II has been the decline, and in some places almost a disappearance, of the practice of regular confession. There were no conciliar documents or the papal decrees declaring its end. It just gradually disappeared from the religious landscape, at least in many places. On the whole, I think this is a good thing. Obsession with sin and guilt, and the preoccupation with mostly minor infractions of divine law, actually can retard the growth of a mature morality. I do recall, how in my first year, I was asked to give a talk in a Baltimore parish, an actual lecture, on the conciliar document called *The Church in the Modern World* from Vatican II. When I finished my talk and paused for questions, a man in the front row spoke up, "Let me get this straight, Father. You still need three things for a mortal sin, right?" Needless to say, that had not been any part of my talk. And we all knew what the three things were: serious matter, sufficient reflection and full consent of the will. And for many older Catholics, this was the essence of religion - the bottom line. The rest was watercress. For not a few Catholics, the need to avoid serious sin created a permanent air of anxiety that, I think, is quite at odds with the confidence in God's love. It is the heart of Christianity. Today's Catholics seem to know that life is for living rather than to be continually asking, "Is it a sin to do thus and so?" Of course, in this past time, the subtext, and sometimes the text, is nearly always sexual, as we older Catholics well know.

The Year of Divine Mercy, which Pope Francis initiated, proclaims in a way a continuing validation of this more positive attitude, as does his image of the Church as a field hospital, providing aid to the wounded in the battle of life.

A few years ago at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs there was a brouhaha about some evangelical ministers who were using their pastoral office to proselytize among the cadets. I recall reading a comment by a local Protestant leader contrasting two different approaches to ministry. One consisted in throwing the bible at people, assuring them that in the pages of Scripture they would find answers to all their problems. The other approach was that ministry involved being with people in their brokenness, drawing on the resources that faith offers to help them. Of course we Catholics were more apt to throw sacraments at people and the bible, but it came to the same thing.

I give an example here, which I think I will abbreviate, where in Sister Helen Prejean's book and the movie made from it, *Dead Man Walking*, about her work with death row inmates in a Louisiana prison. The priest chaplain believed that all you could do for the prisoners was to get them to go to confession and enter eternity with a cleansed soul. Sister Helen believed you could and should and needed to do much more with them. She treated even the worse murderers as real human beings, listening to them, understanding them, offering them an ear and a heart if they were willing to make use of it. Now, I have never had so difficult and demanding a calling as hers; but the idea of being with people in their brokenness seems to me the best description I know of priestly ministry. Of course, this means that you have to invite them to come to you with their brokenness, sometimes waiting until they do. A far cry from the filling station imagery of priesthood that prevailed before Vatican II, when it was assumed that Catholics had to come to us to fill up on grace and forgiveness. We priests controlled the access to the sacraments which was the prescribed way of getting in touch with God. Today, we are much more conscious of being servants of God rather than office managers, dispensing divine permits and pardons. It's a humbler but more satisfying task.

Something I have discovered in spiritual direction, which in some way has taken over from the confessional practice of earlier generations, is that people want more than anything simply to be listened to and understood. If you can find helpful advice to give them, fine; but that's not the most important thing. A psychologist named Donald Nathanson makes an illuminating comment about St. Augustine's confessions in his book *Shame and Pride*. "The God of Augustine," Nathanson quotes, "reads him in every pore, shows him with the feeling of being understood;" and he adds that, "this perfect empathy is the true meaning of love in Christianity." This perfect empathy is the true meaning of love in Christianity. I think this last is a remarkable insight, particularly coming from a Jewish psychologist, and one that, I think, is entirely correct.

When I think of the best spiritual directors that I have been blessed with like, my tertian director, Paul Kennedy, I received from them this kind of empathy. I felt understood. This didn't mean they couldn't be critical, or make suggestions to improve my behavior; and, in fact, Kennedy did. But what made all the different was that I experienced it as being done with love and appreciation for me and for my particular strengths and weaknesses. I try to be that kind of director myself. Some of my directees have described me as their cheer leader; and this too is an important aspect of the director's role. Two decades ago, when I was going through a particularly hard time myself, I went to Father Walter Farrell, a former Jesuit provincial, who had known me for more than 40 years. After hearing my story, he said to me, "Your knowledge of yourself is sound. Believe in it!" Well, I did and do, but there are times when you need to hear that from somebody else; and I heard it from him. I hope you have someone like this in your life.

One of the major changes flowing directly from Vatican II was a view of the Church as the whole people of God, and not simply the pope and the hierarchy; such things as: having the Scriptures read at Mass by lay people, even, of all things, women; having female altar servers; eucharistic ministers; permanent deacons performing baptisms and anointing the sick, and so on, help symbolize and express the changed view of the Church. We still have a long way to go toward realizing a more democratic Church. This more democratic Church, needless to say, for women to have decision making power within the hierarchical structure, and maybe for local election of bishops, in which both clergy and the laity of the diocese are effective participants. The Synod on the Family, called by Pope Francis last year, in which issues like readmitting divorced and remarried Catholics to the sacraments, and having married priests in our Western Rite, were actually on the table. It's a significant step in this direction.

At some point one hopes the Church will be free enough to reconsider the question of the supposed non-ordainability of women, the restriction of the priesthood to males. As you know, Pope John Paul II forbade discussion of this subject regarding the question as definitively closed. He was certain that Christ intended only men to be priests; and so, the Church had no power to change this. Yet, the great Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, in an essay published a few years before his death, did an extensive study of the tradition on this topic, and concluded that there was no reason to think that the historical exclusion of women from priestly ministry was anything but an accommodation to prevailing cultural norms, which were andocentric and patriarchal. As with most things the Church could change this if it chose. More than 45 years ago, shortly after Vatican II, I predicted that within a decade we would have both married clergy and women priests. That just goes to show how good a prophet I am. (*laughter*) It's hard to be patient with the slow pace of reform in the Church, even when I remind myself in the words of the Hindu pundit, "God is not in a hurry."

Fr. Don Cozzens of the Cleveland archdiocese, who I think has spoken to the Elephants, quotes in his book, *Sacred Silence*, an observation of Richard Hedin, to the effect, men in a hierarchical system often feel even more powerless to effect change than those who are completely outside the system - women, for instance. The election of Pope Francis, and his efforts to reform the Curia, and in other ways to change the tenor of Catholicism, has somewhat diminished my sense of frustration, even though not a great deal has been altered; yet, change is clearly on the way. The Church may still be 200 years out of date, as the late Jesuit Cardinal Martini, himself once considered a candidate for the papacy, publically declared before the election of Francis, "But at least the Church is no longer moving backward." The Spirit is alive, and I respect and appreciate Francis' evident desire to bring the whole Church along with the reforms he wants to make. One of my significant learnings about life is that people who are at opposite sides ideologically can sometimes be brought to agree when something practical clearly needs to be done. Francis' efforts to include the vast multitude of divorced and remarried Catholics in the eucharistic community is a good example. His pastoral approach serves to outflank the objections of conservative theologians, and will lead in time, I think, to more radical changes, including some perhaps that his own theology does not presently have room for. At least I hope so.

One of the most important changes for me flowing from Vatican II was the way the conciliar spirit opened up the possibility of friendship with religious women, which until then had been highly restricted. Nuns began to shed those bulky medieval habits, and to dress like the attractive young women many were. They moved out of the huge convents into smaller, more informal communities. At first, when I was in graduate school, and then later in Detroit, being invited to celebrate Mass in some of these small communities, followed by a social hour and dinner, gradually led to developing friendships with individual religious women. This too was an important part of my priestly education. When I entered the Jesuits at 17, I had done a little dating, but developed no significant relationships with the other half of the human race; and from that point on to my ordination, 12 years later, I don't believe I had a single conversation of any length with a woman anywhere near my own age. I think I have more than made up for it since. (laughter) The same Fr. Walter Farrell, whom I mentioned earlier, once said he thought that there was a natural moral imperative for men to know women, and vice versa.

Obviously there were risks in pursuing this natural imperative; and of the ten men who were ordained at Colombiere that June day in 1966, only three of us remained in the active ministry. Now, one of these has since died. All the others left the priesthood in order to marry. I'm sure at least some of them would have been happy to continue in priestly ministry had this been possible in our Church. Some, including one very close friend of mine, had their orders recognized by other Christian communities and served in them.

Those who remained as Catholic priests have, I think, few regrets; but we have benefited enormously from our relationships with women, both religious and lay. The feminine perspective gives a different way of looking at God, life and ourselves, one that is indispensable to human wholeness. I cherish the remark of a 19th century American writer who said, "After God, I am grateful first of all to woman for giving me life, and then, for making it worth having." Another slightly more wry comment from a different source put it this way: "Women and cats will do as they please; and men and dogs had better get used to it." (*laughter*)

I have a few more important things to say. How am I doing on time here? Oh! Wow! Terrific!

A few years ago a leading authority on the priesthood, Monsignor Stephen Rossetti, published a book called, *Why Priests Are Happy*. In it he noted some contrasts between the Vatican II priests, like me, and the younger generation of priests, ordained in the era of Pope John Paul II, or since. The majority of both groups declared themselves satisfied with their calling and even with the requirement of celibacy. But a sizable body of the younger group linked this to their conviction that they were ontologically different from ordinary laypersons. Having been validly ordained, their souls bore an indelible mark that set them apart from the ordinary Catholics. They have the power to confect - dreadful word - the Eucharist and to absolve peoples' sins in the name of Christ - something that no ordinary person could do. This is not a new idea, of course: when I was growing up I remember hearing references to "the awesome power of the priesthood," which I assume referred to the sacramental functions just mentioned. Now I too am happy to be a priest, but I don't see myself as "ontologically different," which seems to me at the very least an unhelpful attitude to have when dealing with laypeople, not to mention clergy of other denominations—"I, sir, am a real priest, while you are only a minister or rabbi or imam"—doesn't make for good dialogue.

I've come to think about priestly orders as analogous to matrimony. When a man and woman get up in church, or elsewhere, to pledge lifelong fidelity to each other—for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer—something very important is taking place; but it's more like the beginning of a journey than its final stage. If their continued commitment proves lasting through all the ups and downs, changes and challenges of married life—and we know, sadly, how often, for all kinds of reasons, this doesn't happen—a real ontological bond is formed. Man and wife become, in the biblical phrase, one flesh. When my own father was dying in the hospital, after 50 years of married life, I remember my mother saying to me, "Poor, dear Gene, he's more myself than I am." More myself than I am. This is true! And when it happens, it's perhaps the most beautiful thing in creation. I think something like this happens to an ordained priest as the man grows into priesthood. It becomes who he is, not just a job he does, or a role he plays. That sense of my ontological difference I can assume I can proclaim without embarrassment.

The moment when Archbishop Dearden anointed and laid his hands on me, declaring me a priest forever, began the forging of a bond which I hope will remain unbroken until I die. By the way, the finest compliment I have ever received was given me by a religious sister, who died some years ago. She said that I was every inch a priest. I hope she was right.

For 44 years now, my principle ministry has been that of teaching. I began, as some of you know, as an English teacher, but lost my position in the department, along with many of my fellow faculty, during a financial crisis at the University in the 1970s. Fortunately, for me, a position teaching literature and theology opened up in the Religious Studies Department the following year. I took it, and have been there every since, teaching a wide range of courses, many of which I had little or no preparation. This has been a great boon to me, for it gave me the opportunity to learn about a great many matters that interested me outside the field of English literature: things like psychology, world religions, the quest for the historical Jesus, and so on. I am particularly grateful for being able to explore in moderate depths the great texts of the Hebrew and Christian bible, and to attempt with varying success to introduce students to the matters of relating to theology to the human condition as reflected in literature. Some years ago Monika Hellwig, a distinguished theologian at Georgetown, gave a talk at U of D about teaching theology; and in the question period I asked her, I said, "Monika," who I knew from the CTSA, I said, "Monika, how do you teach theology to people who don't know the creed, some of whom haven't heard of it?" And she said, "Well, I try to begin with human experience and work out from there." I said, "Well, I'm glad to hear that, because that's what I try to do." Two weeks ago I gave a lecture at the University about my career as a, as I call myself, an accidental theologian. I won't repeat what I said there except to say that mine, throughout my career, has been to reconcile the truths of faith with the truth of life, as expressed in science, philosophy, history and the daily newspaper - such ongoing, challenging process and a deeply rewarding one.

I think I will conclude with this. Tom, in his introduction, mentioned my interest in matters of social ministry, social protest and change. I don't think I deserve quite what he said about them, but on a few occasions, I have tried to do something along this line. For instance, one of my few forays in the political realm took place back in the 1980s, when Sr. Agnes Mary Mansour, RSM, a former president of Mercy College, was appointed by Governor Blanchard to head what was then the Michigan State Department of Social Services. Since the DSS was the governmental agency through which money could be used to pay for abortions, the money was funneled through to poor women. Conservative Catholics raised an outcry over having a nun oversee that department, though she wasn't directly responsible for the funding, and had no control over it. I remember going to Lansing to support her nomination before the Senate, wearing my roman collar, as I generally do, only for funerals and political demonstrations. *(laughter)*

In the Capitol building I rode up in the elevator with a nun in full habit, who was wearing a button declaring her opposition to Sister Agnes Mary's confirmation. She looked at me, evidently assuming I was there for the same reason, and said, "Well, Father, did you ever imagine it would come to this?" "No, Sister," I said, "I didn't." The elevator door opened at the appropriate floor; we both got out; she went to the right and I to the left. (*laughter*) She glared at me across the intervening space. I later learned that she had actually left her community, because they had adopted a modified habit or secular dress. I think she would have found a warm welcome with Mother Angelica had she gone in that direction.

Sister Agnes Mary was confirmed and served for several years in that office before Pope John Paul II issued an ultimatum: either resign or be expelled from the Sisters of Mercy. Unlike Father Bob Drinan, the Jesuit who reluctantly resigned from the U. S. Congress at the insistence of the pope, Agnes Mary continued as the head of the DSS even after Bishop Bevilacqua was dispatched to Michigan to carry out the papal edict. Not only was she kicked out, but her Mercy community was explicitly forbidden to re-admit her, even after she left office. I understand that she continued to turn the bulk of her salary over to her former community. And when she died, she was buried with the sisters in their cemetery. I attended her funeral at Mercy Center, which was celebrated by Bishop Gumbleton, and at which Sister Margaret Farley, a Mercy sister and a distinguished Catholic moral theologian, gave the homily and eulogy.

Sister Margaret herself ran afoul of Church authority in the waning days of Pope Benedict's pontificate when her book *Just Love* was censured for suggesting that Catholic moral teaching on sexuality was in need of fairly drastic revision, particularly in regard to homosexuals. The papacy of Pope Francis has seemingly put a stop to such intrusions, as it did to the inquisition of the faith lives of the American nuns affiliated with the Leadership Council of Women Religious. Let's hope that stays stopped. The behavior of the pope, now Saint Pope John II, in the case as just described, is something I find troubling. Not that his holiness wasn't within his rights, or wasn't acting in good faith for what he understood the well-being of the Church; I'm sure he was. But it seemed both heavy handed and small minded, even vindictive, especially for the man that his biographer, George Weigel, called John Paul, the Great. I trust Sister Mary Agnes has now forgiven him, even if I find it hard to do so.

I could go on about my mixed feelings about the saint, though I won't. I said in a homily at our UDM community after his death in 2003 that all the media adulation of the late pope brings out the Protestant in me. (*laughter*) Dick Tarnas, a member of our community, who was sitting in the front row chimed in, "You wouldn't say that if you were Polish." (*laughter*) I laughed and said, "Maybe not." In any case John Paul was a major figure on the world stage who did very much good.

He needs no special commendation from me that he was a holy man and acted according to his lights, I do not doubt; but he was also a case study in the ambiguity of human holiness, even though, as we deeply admire and revere, were not without their blind spots and limitations. St. Peter's shortcomings did not end with his rehabilitation on Easter Sunday when he was granted a vision of the risen Lord. St. Paul in Acts had to shame him for backsliding when it came to the contentious issue of requiring Gentile converts to observe the Jewish law, which Paul so vigorously opposed.

I've come to see that the declaration that someone is a saint is a kind of induction into the Church's hall of fame. Like inductees into more earthly halls, it does not require one to believe that they always behaved well, or wisely, even in their chosen area of excellence. In John Paul's case we are painfully aware of his turning a blind eye to the crimes committed by Marciel Maciel, the founder of the Legionnaires of Christ, whom Pope Benedict, after John Paul's death, finally required him to resign and spend the rest of his life in a monastery, he who sexually abused many seminarians, and fathered several children with a mistress. I do not entirely blame John Paul for this. Anyone can be taken in by a smooth talking con man with a flair and without a conscience, which Maciel certainly was, but there was something about John Paul's approach to religion that made him peculiarly vulnerable to the kind of scam that Maciel was so good at working. He talked the conservative theological line that appealed to the pope and slathered an abundance of cash on Vatican approved causes and offices; and the Pope was suspicious where he shouldn't have been, and naive where he should have been suspicious. As I said, this could happen to anyone, but John Paul was not an entirely accidental victim. In a certain way he was asking for it; and this may help account for his passivity and defensiveness in dealing with the sexual abuse crises. Let's pray it doesn't happen again.

Let me conclude by saying what I think is probably obvious to you. I am very happy to be a priest, and extremely grateful for the blessings and opportunities my vocation has brought with it. Working with my fellow priests, and even with the clergy of other denominations, has been a great gift. I could go on at quite boring lengths about the goodness I have encountered in the ordinary faithful. I won't do that, but I do look forward to many more years of ministry, and tremendous riches that it has brought my way. Thank you very much.
(Applause)

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