



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

Website: elephantsinthelivingroom.com



FR. DONALD COZZENS EDUCATIONAL FORUM

SACRED HEART, DETROIT
SEPTEMBER 18, 2006

INTRODUCTION

FR. TOM

LUMPKIN

I think Don Cozzens is one of the most insightful people speaking about the priesthood and the Church and its crises it is facing today – that we have right now – and I say insightful, because I think his insights come both from a certain amount of scholarly background and a certain amount of just plain pastoral experience. His scholarly background is: he is presently teaching in the Religious Studies Department at John Carroll University in Cleveland. In the past he was a Professor of Psychology and Religious Studies at Ursuline College. He has an MA from the University of Notre Dame, a PhD from Kent State University. So, he has that kind of scholarly background that contributes to those insights that he has; and then, he has a lot of practical experience.

He, for a time, was the Episcopal Vicar for the Clergy in the Cleveland Diocese and, I believe, that whenever a priest was leaving, that Don had a chance to... he was the one, the point person, who got to talk to them and tried to work out all those arrangements when a priest was leaving the active ministry. He was the rector of the seminary in Cleveland for many years; and he's also minister, a spiritual director, counselor and retreat master for priests, as well as nuns, and even bishops. He's given a retreat to Detroit bishops, I think, at one time many years ago. He's the author of five books on the Church and the priesthood; and all of them are available from the Catholic Book store in the book shelf over there. You are welcome to peruse. So, I'm going to invite Fr. Cozzens to speak to us on the topic of his latest book: *Freeing Celibacy*. (applause)

THE CHALLENGE TO BE ADULT DISCIPLES

FR. DONALD COZZENS

Tom, thank you very much. That was a moving introduction. I'm not called insightful very often, and so thank you for that. And thank you for coming this afternoon. I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see so many of you here, when you have so many other things that you could be doing. But it is a great sight simply to look upon you. We began by singing, *Lord of the Dance*. And as you people came into this room, I thought to myself that God dances in you, and you need to keep dancing. There's a television commercial that uses technology and animation to depict an elephant dancing. Have you every seen that commercial? The music to it is just great. I am so honored to be here with the Elephants and to see you elephants dancing. Now you either do that well or not if you're an elephant, but you do know how to dance; and it is God's Spirit in you dancing. And I'm hoping that our conversation this afternoon will sustain the dance and keep it going. There's something about an elephant that is endearing. It's a huge, huge animal; and yet it seems to be, to me, a humble animal. I'll leave that up to you whether or not an elephant is humble. But I heard there's another group of people here in this archdiocese, whether they're still together or not, I don't know; but I was sitting next to one of them at lunch, and I think this group was called *The Cockroaches* (laughter). Now any Church – and if the Church of Detroit has groups who love the gospel, who are ready to call themselves Elephants and Cockroaches – they're my kind of people. And I'm just very, very glad to be with you here this afternoon.

I was speaking to Tom Gumbleton. He said the title of my presentation would be *Freeing Celibacy*, and I will say something about that in relatively few minutes. But that is not the real focus of my remarks this afternoon. I would like to talk about the challenge you and I have to be adult disciples. And in the context of adult discipleship, I will be making some remarks about celibacy and its relationship to some of the scandals and trials and crises we are faced with today.

I do a fair amount of speaking to groups of priests, and let me tell you, that whenever I meet them, there are always priests who know how to dance; and they have hope and courage, and these men give me hope and courage. But there are also other men whom I would like to describe as simply surviving. You ask them what's going on in your life and they'll say "Things are okay;" but you get the impression that what they're really struggling to do is simply to survive. Many of them have had it with downtown and diocesan headquarters. They're discouraged that the insights and promise of the Second Vatican Council seem to be rolled back in many significant areas of the Church, and some of these men seem to have withdrawn their world to the boundaries of their parish. And they're counting the years until they can retire. Now I wish they had a group of Elephants and Cockroaches nearby. These men need a shot in the arm.

On Serious Conversation: Blessed Communion

We're here today because we know that if we are only surviving then we really have not heard the gospel, and we're not doing what we can to speak to this Church that we love so very, very much. When we gather, when you gather for your monthly meetings of the Elephants, I think what you are about is serious conversation leading to blessed communion. That line that I've just shared with you is from Walter Brueggemann. I believe you will find it in his book *The Prophetic Imagination*. But Walter Brueggemann says, when we gather for meetings like this, what we are about is: serious conversation leading to blessed communion. Serious conversation means that we know that a lot is at stake, and we might be dancing elephants, but we need to have serious conversation. We need to listen to each other. We need to listen to each others experiences of what it means to be disciples of Jesus. And if our conversation is real – in others words, if we listen to other people without simply being polite – then serious conversation occurs.

As a priest, I've heard people say, "You know the trouble with the clergy is: you don't listen." And when I share that with some of my brother priests, they get very upset and they say, "We listen very hard!" I've heard bishops say that, when they have been accused of not listening. "We listen very hard, I resent that remark!" But what do we pastoral leaders listen for – lay pastoral ministers, religious pastoral ministers, ordained leaders in our Church? Often, we listen for a question, 'cause we clergy are the teachers. So, we listen hard to your question; and that's good, because that's part of our responsibility. But we listen so that we might offer an answer to you. And then sometimes we listen for your problem – we who are your pastoral ministers. And we listen hard to your problem, so that we might help you with a solution. And that's another important part of listening. But where we clergy sometimes fail is: that we don't really listen to be informed. And because we don't listen to be informed, we are not transformed by the conversation.

How many times do we really listen to your experience – those of you who are not directly involved in pastoral ministry – of your experience of being a disciple? I know a number of bishops who don't really listen to their priests' experience of pastoral ministry and what 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 and sometimes 70 years of priestly ministry have taught them. In one way or another you are all in ministry. Listen to your own experience of trying to bring the mercy and the goodness of God to other people. So if we enter into serious conversation, that means, at times,

we will listen for a question, so that we might respond with an answer. We're going to listen to problems, so that we might suggest a solution to the problem. But, let us also listen to each others experiences. That's where God's grace is working. And when we do listen to another person's experience, to their joys and sorrows, their struggles and successes, we understand that God's grace is alive in the world. And that prompts us to dance. That keeps us from losing hope; and that allows us to have a vision.

We can't be adult disciples unless we are about serious conversation. And that serious conversation will lead to communion – not necessarily one mind, but one mind in the important things: that Jesus is the Christ; that God's Spirit is to be found in our assemblies; that God's word is always fresh and relevant to our struggles and to our journey. Blessed communion doesn't mean we all have to agree; but it means that we do respect each other, and we acknowledge that the Spirit of God can be working through all of us – and very often the least among us. For God's Spirit is loose in the world and sometimes we Church people want to control that Spirit and speak the final word about what the Spirit is doing: serious conversation leading to blessed communion. Within that word communion we find the word union, and I think the cultural divide that we find in our Church today needs to be overcome: it's sapping our energy. When people accuse us of being disloyal to the gospel, they accuse us of being disloyal to the Church. And that's hard to receive that criticism, because you are here today because of your great love of the Church. And I would not be surprised that there are some people in the Church of Detroit who feel you are less than loyal by your very presence here today.

And then, if we are people of union and communion, we're also people of reunion. Try to really be the people God wants us to be so that other people will say to us: "What is it about you that keeps you dancing, even in difficult times?" And so here we gather, trying to enter into serious conversation, looking for people who want to say to us:

- "Tell me your story about being a faithful disciple."
- "What has it been like for you to be married all these years?"
- "What has parenthood taught you?"
- "What do you really want to say to your grandchildren and to those who come after you?"

We have a marvelous story to tell, ordinary folks that we are, and so seldom do we have an opportunity for serious conversation. And without it there's no real community. And without it, our hearts will not be primed to hear God's word.

The Feudal System

Why is adult discipleship so difficult; and why are some of us – not many in this room – but why are some of us simply surviving rather than thriving? Well, I've tried to say it one time: it's because the Church can be understood as the last feudal system in the West. And if you understand the Church's' structure as a feudal system - as fundamentally a feudal system - that can help us to understand why serious conversation is always such a challenge.

Now let me take you back to your world history years, either in grade school, or high school, or college. A feudal system is based on the benefice system, where a sovereign grants territory, or benefice, or fiefdom to a chosen person. If we were to think of the Church as a feudal system, we might understand the sovereignty the Bishop of Rome, our Pope; and we could understand the diocese, for example, the archdiocese of Detroit, a benefice, as a feudal system; and the Archbishop is named by the Pope as the one who is to lead this particular benefice. And then we might even think of a parish as a benefice, where a bishop names a priest as pastor to a given parish.

Now Louis Brueyes, a very important French theologian, when he wrote about the Church as a feudal system, he reminded us that at the heart of the feudal system is what is referred to in Latin as *Dominium*; and it really means what the English word *Dominion* indicates. When a man is given a diocese, and when a man is given a parish, of course, there are many responsibilities that he accepts at that time: very serious responsibilities of maintaining union with the Universal Church, and making sure the word is preached and reaching out to those who are unfortunate. But a person, who enjoys dominion, has discretionary control over the money, the personnel and the resources of the benefice – same can be said, to a certain extent of a pastor: a pastor enjoys dominion. If he pays his assessments, and more or less stays out of trouble, he has discretionary control over the finances, personnel and resources of the parish. Now, of course, canon law tries to say its not quite that simple, because there are finance councils, both on the parish level and the diocesan level, that are meant to make sure that things are done right. But, you know, the next major wave of scandals to overtake the Church will be in the area of finances, because a feudal system begs for abuse. It's not that there are necessarily crooked people who are in charge, but it's so easy to abuse a feudal system. Now, if the bishops can be thought of as lords of the manor, and if our pastors can be understood as vassals, I think you know how we might understand the laity: the laity could be understood as the serfs. Now, feudal systems worked, and in fact it was to the Church's wellbeing that we more or less followed a feudal structure; and it worked very well when the serfs were not educated. But the European feudal system started to break down when the serfs were able to leave their particular land and move to the towns which were just emerging at that time, and further their education, and become merchants and skilled craft persons.

The laity in this room, I hope you know, that people have described you as the best educated Catholics in the history of the church. And you see, when you are educated, you learn how to think critically. And that doesn't mean you are not loyal. But it means you learn how to think critically. And of course that changes everything, because a hundred years ago, we had a different kind of laity in this country: smart people, intelligent people, but for the most part, not blessed with the benefits of a formal education that teaches us the discipline of thinking critically. I think we're finding the feudal system of the Church - and I'm talking here about structure – the Church always need a structure – but I think one of the things we're looking for is a healthier structure for the Church. Now some people might say: "Well, there's a feudal system, don't forget that a feudal system is really grounded on loyalty." And I'd like to suggest that's why some people feel that we who gather here this afternoon are not completely loyal to the Church. Lords of the manor had to be loyal to the sovereign; vassals/pastors have to be loyal to the lord of the manor/bishop; and the laity, the serfs, had to be loyal to the pastor, to the bishop, to the Church.

Pray, pay and obey reflects a rather passive attitude. Believe, behave, be saved is the same connotation. So the role of the laity is fundamentally passive. But, you know, its not working anymore. And because the feudal system is breaking down, if every so slowly, adult disciples, laity, religious, lower clergy were acting like adults. And adults ask questions - not just for answers or solutions - they ask questions to enter into serious conversation. Some of you have heard me speak of a wonderful book written by a New Zealand bishop, his name is John Heaps, and he wrote a book entitled, *Love That Dares to Question*. You see, some people who feel that even if you ask questions of your pastors, that's a sign that you're not really loyal. But questioning is a part of adulthood. I published a book in the year 2004 entitled *Faith that Dares to Speak*. I took that title from Bishop Heaps book, *Love That Dares to Question*. You dancing elephants keep daring to question; it's a sign of loyalty, not disloyalty. You dancing elephants dare to speak from your experience. Pray for the right voice so it isn't shrill and uncharitable. Pray for the right voice, but dare to listen, dare to question, dare to speak.

On Celibacy

When we become adults, and it's possible for some of us older clergy not to be really fully adult, because in some ways the system keeps us at an adolescent level; and I think that's one of the negative aspects of mandatory celibacy that is being lived by a person who has not been blessed with the charism of celibacy – we're not quite fully adult. And I'm suggesting today, what the Church needs very much at this critical time in its history is adult discipleship on the part of the hierarchy, the clergy, the religious, the laity. An adult is somebody who is integrated, has integrated his or her sexuality, his or her intellectual life into a meaningful whole, has integrated his or her spiritual life into a meaningful whole, that makes up this person's personality. An integrated adult is a person who is filled with peace, especially if one is a Christian; it's the very peace of Christ. There's a certain calmness that we find in truly adult people. We might say that the fully adult person, especially if that adulthood has been enfleshed by the Gospel, is a person in secular language who is happy - and that's why it's good to be a dancing elephant. We have to show to each other, and everyone whom we meet, that we are not just surviving; that Christ is at the heart of our lives; that we believe the Holy Spirit is loose in the world. And yes, these are difficult times; and they will probably become even more difficult; but our spirit will not be broken. We believe that God dances in us, and as long as we have the strength, we are going to keep dancing.

Now what allows a person to be an adult, integrated individual who is happy? The philosophers and the psychologists say you find no adulthood without freedom. We have to acknowledge that we have been destined for freedom. We read the New Testament; we hear about the spirituality that allows us to be free. We preachers of the word are meant to be liberators. We go around telling people that even though they might be very insignificant in the eyes of the world, they are God's beloved, and they are precious in God's eyes. But, so many people don't see the Church as the great liberator of the spirit; they see the Church as the great controller of the Spirit. And whether it's founded in reality or not, they see the Church as somehow trying to limit their life and restrict their life, so that they might not be led into temptation, and then, sin. And, of course, we have to be careful about being led into temptation and sin; but the greater danger is not to understand that our heritage is gospel freedom.

But what's beneath freedom? Well the philosophers tell us there's no real freedom without courage. You and I are called to be men and women of courage at this time: to listen to each other, to listen to the teachings of the Church, to listen to our bishops, to listen to our pastors, to listen to our theologians, to listen to our scholars; but at the same time listen to them out of our own experience. And for some of us that takes courage.

Some of you, I know, have heard of the book by Paul Tillich, the great Lutheran theologian and philosopher, called *The Courage to Be*. And Tillich said: "Just to be an authentic adult person takes moral courage." I think I'm looking at an awful lot of very, very brave people - the courage to maintain your vision of the Church; the courage to enter into serious conversation, so that your vision and my vision can be affected by the vision of others. Because we could be confident we'll find the Spirit in the communion of believers. And that's why serious conversation is so very important. And then what lies under courage. Well for you and me, what lies under courage is our faith in Jesus the Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit to be here in our midst, for we began this meeting this afternoon in prayer, and in praise, and in song, and in listening to God's word. When we have adult disciples, we have disciples who are free, courageous and faithful. And when that is the situation, then our tendency to denial seems to just melt away.

We elephants are here because we looked around a few years ago and said, "Why can't people see the elephant in the living room?" Well, sometimes seeing the elephant in the living room is

very, very difficult, and it takes great courage; because, then, we're going to have to say things aren't really as they might be, and that we have to make some changes. We have to renew. We have to reform. And for some of us, that is very threatening. And so we literally do not see the elephant in the living room. The book, *Sacred Silence: Denial and the Crises in the Church*, tried to take a look at that. Why is it so difficult for us as individuals and as an institution to see the elephant that other people can see? Now denial is not simply a problem of the Church, every institution really has to deal with this temptation of denial. We see it in government; we see it in business; we see it in education; and, yes, we see it in the Church. But, I think, we expect more of the Church because the Church brings this message to us that says you don't have to be afraid to look at reality – you do not have to be afraid. So, I expect more from our Church. And while I understand the denial, it is at the same time, so very, very difficult.

Now, if we are going to be adult believers, I think there are certain qualities of life that we need and here I'm going to speak to the priests present this afternoon. If we're going to be adult disciples, there has to be intimacy in our lives. Now, I realize intimacy is a loaded term. In our culture it very often is a code word for sexual intercourse. I'm not talking about sexual or genital intimacy; I'm talking about another dimension to life that, I believe, God has destined each of us for; and I'm referring to the kind of intimacy that we have with profound friendship. We enjoy intimacy with a few people, and it's really impossible to enjoy intimacy with 748 people or 125 people but we enjoy intimacy with another when we cannot only share with them our fears, and our weaknesses, and our insecurities; but when we can share with another our dreams, and our hopes, and our ideals. A lot of priests live lives that are strangers to the reality of intimacy.

Tom mentioned that I was Vicar for Clergy and Religious for a half dozen years in the Diocese of Cleveland, and as a matter of course, I met with the priests who were believing that God was calling them to leave active ministry – not because they didn't like active ministry ; they liked it very much. In fact, I found myself after a while asking a priest, who was in the process of leaving, "What will you miss the most about being a priest?" And most often they would say two things: "I will miss celebrating mass and preaching." When the priest said that to me, I've often felt tears coming to my eyes. This man had the charism of priest; this man had the calling of priest; but he knew something was missing in his life, something vital and real. It's one of the things that motivated me to write this short reflection, *Freeing Celibacy*; because, if celibacy is going to work – and I argue in this book celibacy is a great gift to the Church if you possess the charism for it or the gift for it – but what we have done for the last 900 years in the Latin Church is to legislate a charism, and say to every man who presents himself for ministry as a Latin Rite priest since the middle of the twelfth century: "Then God will give you the gift of celibacy." I think that's very interesting.

Do we know God's mind – God, the great mystery, so well – that we can speak for God? Say, "You will be blessed with the charism of celibacy, if you accept it". Why hasn't God given the same gift of celibacy to Eastern Rite Catholic Churches that are in full communion with Rome? What about the Orthodox Churches that have always had a married clergy? What's going on here? In *Freeing Celibacy* I try to speak very positively about the charism and the power of gifted celibacy, and then critically of the practice of legislating a gift. Sandra Schneider is a marvelous scripture scholar that many of you know of, has taught seminaries herself for a number of years, and she said, "From my experience in the seminary, when you're trying to teach men to lead healthy celibate lives, who do not have the charism, it's like trying to teach people who can't dance the two-step to be ballerinas". (Laughter) You can work as hard as you can, but it is tricky.

Now, half of the world isn't married – almost literally half of the world is not married, when you consider adolescents, teenagers, children, widows, widowers, divorced, celibates. You don't

really need to be married to be an adult disciple; but what you do need to be is someone who has the capacity for real intimate friendship. You see, intimate friendship is a gift, and there are some people who really do not have intimate friends – their spouse isn't an intimate friend – but they have the capacity for it. That's the issue! Do we have the real capacity to receive the gift of intimate friendship? That makes us adults. And I think one of the crosses that the priesthood is wrestling with today is a mistrust of human friendship and human intimacy.

I've been ordained a long time now – I'm in my fifth decade as a priest – and we've come a long way in our seminaries in terms of addressing celibacy, human sexuality and intimacy. In my day it was simply: *numquam solus cum sola*. My brother priests know that simply means – never be alone with a woman. (Laughter) Now today we understand that it also should have been: *numquam solus cum soli* – but never be alone with a man, if your orientation happens to be towards the same sex. So, it was more of a negative: just don't get too close to people.

I think there are a number of priests whose souls have shriveled up because, in the name of celibacy, they've kept everybody at a distance. And I'd like to suggest that if you don't have the charism of celibacy, in trying to be a celibate priest, you can arrest your psychosexual-development at the level of adolescence. We have a lot to learn from the clergy sexual abuse scandal. I think many of you know that most of the people who have been abused by clergy have been teenagers – and not only that: mostly teenage boys. We have true pedophiles; thank God they are few. But we do have pedophiles in the priesthood! You don't have to have a clinical background in psychology to know that a pedophile is an adult whose primary sexual interest is in a pre-pubescent boy or girl. And with a true pedophile, the gender of the little boy or little girl is not that significant. Most of the clergy that have acted out against minors have not been pedifiles, or pedophiles, in the strict sense of the word; they have been drawn to teenagers. And the psychological community could say that even though the priest who did the offending might have been in his thirties, forties, or fifties or sixties, from a developmental point of view, he was a teenager himself emotionally. You see, if you are not an adult disciple, if you are not truly an adult, you're going to find adult relationships with your own age cohort somehow threatening.

I think this area of concern that I've just tried to outline needs further study. We need to find out, if unwittingly, mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests of the Latin Rite has contributed sadly to the clergy sexual abuse scandals that we find ourselves struggling with today. If you control a person's sexuality, you really control a person. And for the priest whose gift is celibacy, then he doesn't see the discipline of celibacy as in anyway constricting. But, if a man does not possess the gift of charism, only God's grace, and a sincere struggle to lead a spiritual life, will keep him out of harms way. I realize that most pedophiles are married men. Well, of course, most pedophiles are married men! There are far more married men in our society than there are priests in our society. But we have to take a look at what the incident rate is for abuse against minors of priests compared to the population at large. And while there have been some studies along this line, we need many more of them.

Conclusion

So I am suggesting today, that is: we gather together, and praise God, and acknowledge that God is the Lord of the Dance, and that we are called to be adult disciples; that God is calling us to spiritual leadership, especially those of you who are in pastoral ministry. God is calling you to be a spiritual leader. What does that require of us? We must be men and women of prayer, first of all. And that prayer very often has to take on a contemplative dimension. I think we all know people say a lot of prayers, but they're not really a prayerful person. David Stendalrath says, "The reason that we pray, the reason we say our prayers, is so that we can be a prayerful person; that something happens to our awareness and to our consciousness; that we have a different

kind of sensitivity.” If we’re a prayerful person, we’re going to be able spontaneously to enter into serious conversation; we’re going to listen differently. And we’re going to find our right voice; and when we speak, we will be inviting other people to speak. And then, if we are going to be spiritual leaders, we have to be people who read. In other words, we have to have an interior life.

I met with a group of priests last night in Cleveland – I won’t say anything more about who they were – but most of these men do not read – and they’re not embarrassed to acknowledge that. There’s a certain kind of anti-intellectualism still prevalent in the priesthood. They don’t even read *America* or *Commonweal*, or the more popular magazines and newspapers dealing with the Church. They don’t read literature. They don’t read poetry. And for some of them, they’re just too exhausted at the end of the day to read. But for others, there’s no real interest, no hunger for this kind of expansion of soul. So, if we’re going to be spiritual leaders, we have to have a vital interior life. If you have a vital interior life, you’re not going to be discouraged, and you’re not going to lose hope, and you’re going to truly be a beneficial presence; and wherever you go, you’re going to be doing the work of the Spirit.

So I hope that as you continue to meet here regularly, you will be challenged to understand that, ordained or not, vowed or not, you are called to spiritual leadership. And that means that you begin to cultivate an interior life, because then your very witness of discipleship will draw people to Christ.

The other challenge I would like to leave with you this afternoon is this: that a true spiritual leader tries to live a life of gospel simplicity – and I almost choke on the words, because I’m afraid I know the least thing about gospel simplicity. It’s a very difficult thing to define. It doesn’t mean that you have no possessions; I do think it means that your attitude toward your possessions is very, very important. If we ministers try to lead lives of gospel simplicity, clericalism would just dissolve like ice cream on a hot afternoon. And then we would not be triumphalistic. And then we would really be bonding with our people. And then so many things that are difficult would take on a completely different panorama.

So I know there will be a question and answer period following our break, and I look forward to entering into serious conversation with you good people. But, believe me, God is dancing in you, and God blesses you, and right now is sustaining you in faith and in courage. So thanks very much. (Applause)

SUMMARY

FR. TOM LUMPKIN

Every time we’ve had one of these Elephants forums, after the presentation, I always get the feeling inside myself, “Boy it was really good for me to hear that today.” It’s something I really needed, and today was no exception to that experience.

Question: Many of us have been dancing a long, long time, but we are not recognized or acknowledged by the bishops, and I think what happened just this past weekend with the comments of Pope Benedict, going into a 14th century quoting his putdown, kind of, of Islam and the reaction. And I know! I had an email late last night from Victor Bag, who is the National Islamic Council person; and he sent me his comments. And they were very gentle, but they are really hurting. And I think this is indicative! We’re being kept back in the 14th century. We’re serfs; and we’re all being kept in that era. And would you comment on that, please.

Answer: Well, I think you heard the question and it's more of an observation, but a very serious one, and thank you for raising that issue. You know, some people feel we've been dancing, and dancing, and dancing, and trying, and trying, and trying; and you only have so much energy; and so do you blame us for being discouraged? I give a number of talks to *Voice of the Faithful* affiliates, and very often that is what surfaces. You know, we're not radical people; we love the Church. We are speaking from our experience; and we get the feeling that we are not being listened to. So, why not just say, "I've given it my best shot and now being me, being an adult disciple, means that I'm simply going to disassociate myself from the assembly, and try to lead a very good, charitable and decent life, and save myself a lot of heartache." I don't know if that description of a tired dancer makes any sense to you, but it does to me. This very same question was put to Thomas Merton by a young man, who had worked very hard as part of the peace movement in the United States. Of course, this was during the Vietnam War, and he said, "I've been dancing as hard as I can. I've been trying to really raise peoples' consciousness, and nothing seems to be done. No action is taken. We're not really listened to. We're, just like, screaming into the wind, and our voice comes back to us." Merton wrote this young peace activist, I think, a very important letter that would apply to us today. And Merton's comment to him was – and I'm not sure you'll find this satisfactory – he said, "Let's look back to the previous social movement, which had to do with trying to overcome racism in our country; and many people worked very hard to bring about a more just United States in terms of race relations;" Merton said, "You have to work as if you will never see the full realization of that which you hoped for. And if you really expect to see a dramatic real change in your lifetime, then you might indeed become discouraged. Now, I think we have a right to look for change in our lifetime. Whether or not we will see it in our lifetime is not the real issue." I think we have to keep working for renewal in the Church so the Church's mission will be fulfilled; and maybe we will not be able to live long enough to see that day, but it was as if Merton were saying that isn't the real issue. And if you're looking for change in your lifetime, that's human enough, but there's always the possibility that we won't see it.

I said in passing, just a few minutes ago, that I think things will probably get worse before they get better, and how are we to keep dancing through all of these trying times. I mean, how can they get worse? Well in a way, let us count the ways. (Laughter) I think things can get worse especially in the area of financial scandals. I think they might get worse. You alluded to Pope Benedict XVI's remarks that puzzle a lot of us, because this is a, I think, a very bright, bright, bright man. Some say his remarks were taken out of context, but the more of the context that I become familiar with, they still seem to be jarring remarks. I realize now that Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, who I believe used to be President of the Pontifical Council for Interfaith Relations is the new nuncio to Egypt. Archbishop Fitzgerald is fluent in Arabic and many other Middle Eastern languages. I think Archbishop Fitzgerald is going to play a healing role in this. But all I'm suggesting is: I think I understand the frustration that I think you expressed, and I think we need to keep entering into serious conversation, because that will lead to blessed communion; and that's where we find out hope and our energy. And that's all that we can do, because that's all that God can ask of us. But thank you for that.

Question: How would anybody know that they had the charism for celibacy; the actual gift, the ability to do this at an early age? How would they know for sure if it simply wasn't mandated?

Answer: That's a wonderful question. It's not, like say, the charism to be a gifted musician; sometimes it very, very clear. I would say there is a confluence of temperament, a personality, the person isn't asexual. But somehow the person wrestles with a mysterious voice – if you can let me get away with that term – that says that this might be your truth. The second chapter of *Freeing Celibacy* is a chapter focused on celibacy as a charism. I speak of the movie *Chariots of*

Fire, where the lead actor in that movie said, he was a marvelous athlete as well as a theological student. He said “When I run, I feel God’s pleasure.” And I think when you have the charism of celibacy, from time to time, you feel God’s pleasure, because you suspect it is your truth: this is right for me. And with that goes, I think, hospitality and a non-judgmental attitude. I think all of in this room at one time or another; has met a woman or a man with the charism of celibacy. I write at rather great lengths of Sister Kilian Hufgard, an Ursuline sister who died a few years ago. When I was teaching at Ursuline College in Cleveland, Sister Kilian, a good generation older than I, audited my classes, which moved me a great deal. And she volunteered to tutor me in art and the theory of art – the history of art. Sister Kilian was a true charismatic celibate. This was her truth. We find it in some priests – in fact, I’d say, many priests. I’m not sure if we find it in the majority of priests. It’s hard to know if an individual really does have the charism; and it even becomes more difficult, because God can call someone to the charism of celibacy perhaps later in life. And it’s almost like you can find free people, spiritually free people, in prison. I think you can find spiritually free priests who have, by the grace of God and courage and faith, they’ve made celibacy work for them, who did not possess the charism of celibacy. But that, in itself, should not justify making celibacy mandatory.

But you’re correct! How do you know if you have the charism of celibacy? The Church says, “Don’t worry about it, because if you are ordained, God will give you the grace to lead a life of celibate chastity in the priesthood.” But that is a real question of discernment, and sometimes it takes a lifetime to figure out what charisms really have been bestowed upon us. So, theologically, you’ve gotten to the heart of the matter: how does a young candidate preparing for the priesthood actually say to himself “This is my charism?” It’s awfully hard to answer that question.

Question: Father, one aspect of the question of celibacy that I wish you could address some remarks towards is, oh, I guess, you would call it self-discipline. The reason why I say that is: it’s seems as if most of what you said is about the charism of celibacy as a gift from God, and the reason why I would like to hear more about that aspect of it is simply because we are all, no matter what our marital status is, are all called to lead chaste lives. And as a single man, who’s not a priest, I also struggle with the celibacy issue myself; and I know it’s possible, because I’ve been celibate for over 10 years myself. But in my case, much has to do with listening to the teachings of our Church about chastity and the need for self-control. And I’m not certain it’s been a gift. I’m not saying I have the charism of celibacy. I think there is an aspect of the whole question of celibacy which is not being dealt with in these remarks. And I wonder if you could touch at least upon that aspect of it. It also requires, you know, a certain degree of self-control.

Answer: Well you’ve raised the issue of chastity; and I’m grateful to you for doing that, because, as you pointed out, every baptized person, in fact the Church would say, because of natural law, every person is called and obliged to lead a life of chastity, which means the proper living out of one’s sexuality. If one is married, one is chaste in leading a very fruitful married life. Chastity for the married person, among other things, means fidelity to one’s spouse. So whether one is married, single, avowed, religious, or an ordained priest, she or he is called to lead a life of chastity, which is the appropriate expression of one’s sexuality in light of one’s state in life.

So even for the priest, who enjoys the charism of celibacy, that priest is called to lead a life of disciplined chastity, because whether one possesses the charism or not, there will be times when discipline, and prayer, and asceticism are necessary. So having the charism doesn’t mean that: boy, celibacy and chastity are always a piece of cake. At times, it is a real struggle! What I tried to say earlier is that: if one’s emotional life is without honest, celibate intimacy, the struggle for chastity becomes all the more difficult. And so, some people would say to the celibate priest, you

shouldn't have close relationships with either men or women, because it is too dangerous. I'd like to suggest it's even more dangerous not to have adult celibate friendships with men and women of your own age cohort. One of the things that I think we're sensing now: we're coming to see that most of the priests who have abused minors do not have close friends in their own age cohort. I don't think priests should vacation with teenagers. I think priests should vacation with people roughly their own age. And in the past, it was not unusual to see a priest vacation with teenagers. We said, "You know, Father's always working on vocations;" and very often, Father was. But I think when one's vacation and one's social life – and we all need a healthy social life – I think they should be with people roughly our own age.

But discipline is always necessary, whether one is blessed with the charism of celibacy or not. It would be unfair to have a law of mandatory marriage for priests because some priests would not have the charism for marriage. See I don't think we can legislate a charism; and, in effect, we have tried to do this. But anyway, thank you for that observation.

Question: Can you contrast the experience of mandatory celibacy for the diocesan priests as compared to the religious order priests?

Answer: I think almost everybody in this room knows the distinction between a diocesan priest and a religious order priest. The diocesan priest is in a sense wedded to a local Church that we call the diocese, and more often than not, he will spend the totality of his ministry within that diocese. A person who is say, called to be a Dominican, a Franciscan, a Jesuit, a Benedictine, feels called to the priesthood, but also feels a call to religious life, which means a life of community and a shared mission. I would say most of the priests that enjoy both the charism of priesthood and the charism of celibacy also feel a call to vowed religious life. So, and apparently you listened carefully, I referred to mandatory celibacy for diocesan priests of the Latin Rite because, theoretically anyway, a person who feels called to be a Benedictine, Jesuit, Franciscan, Dominican, feels a call to priesthood as well as religious life. Now some psychologists say, "The religious order priest is called to community and, by and large, that should make it easier to lead a celibate life, because of the communal dimension; and it's harder for the diocesan priest, who doesn't have that same call."

Now years ago, we priests lived in rectories with at least another priest – sometimes two, three or even four. The idea of a rectory with two to three priests today is becoming more and more rare in the United States. Most of our parishes are one priest parishes. In fact many parishes are sharing a priest/pastor. I think we're moving towards one-fourth of our parishes in the United States are without a resident pastor – it's definitely one-fifth – and I think the statistics are moving in that direction. I've heard some religious order priests say that, in theory, that response might be more or less on target. But I've heard some religious order priests say, "The reason I am a religious order priest, Vincentian, Benedictine, whatever, is that those were the priests who staffed our parish when I was growing up. So I felt called to the priesthood; and the priests I knew best happened to be Franciscans, Benedictines or whatever they were. That's why I entered the Benedictines or the Franciscans," because we have seen also an exodus from religious orders of priests who feel called to marriage.

Question: Do you think that the community assists them in these community issues?

Answer: Ideally it should assist them, yes. In the Cleveland seminary system we have two seminaries, St. Mary's Seminary and Graduate School of Theology, which is our theologate, and then Borromeo Seminary, which is our college seminary, the college seminary which is also the site of formation for Capuchin Franciscans seminarians. So they have their own community life

within the seminary culture. And some of our diocesan seminarians would say, "I am really attracted to the Capuchins, because they seem to have a stronger community life," where, at least in the past, we diocesan priests in the past were more or less emotional lone rangers: you love God; you say your prayers; you have a relationship with Christ; you visit your family on your day off and for the holidays; but there are a lot of priests today who do not have family, and for a lot of priests, the holidays are a terrible time.

And then some of our priests do not know how to negotiate an adult celibate relationship. And then socially, it's difficult sometimes to negotiate an adult social relationship. My brother priests here, if you've ever had a nice dinner with a woman in a restaurant, and you run into parishioners, it sometimes a little awkward. I was having dinner, not too long ago, and I ran into a cardinal. (Laughter) And it's a little tricky. Let me put it that way. But I think even that takes a certain amount of courage to say, "I'm a committed celibate, and I've been blessed with friendships, married couples, single men, single women." Ideally, yes, priests should have dear friends who are also priests. And, very often, that is the case. But thank you for that question.

Question: Could you talk to the issue of a limited number of years of service as a priest; and then an added question: What's the motivation, besides the conventional reasons, for life-long commitment to priesthood?

Answer: If I heard your question correctly, would I comment on limited terms of being a priest like Richard Rohr and Andrew Greeley speak of. We're going to ordain someone for commitment to the Church for a period of ten years, or twelve, or whatever it might be, and then after that period of ten or twelve years, then the person returns to another lifestyle. Now, if your theology is such that once a priest always a priest, then the limit of twelve years as priest then going back to say a lifestyle that is more common to a layperson would be problematic. I think there are theological problems there, and probably your theology of priesthood will lead to whether or not you could even see that as something we should give some thought to. Other people will dismiss it out of hand and say, "You know, it just won't work." But I think we could learn something from our Buddhist brothers and sisters, who have a great regard for celibacy, but not necessarily as a lifetime commitment.

Question: In light of the priests that have been removed permanently, what does say about the character of lifelong priesthood?

Answer: Well, yes, we're defrocking priests apparently at a rate we haven't for quite a while. I think our theology says: "If you're a defrocked priest, you are no longer to live or function as a priest, nor present yourself as a priest". But I think our theology says that if a defrocked priest, or a priest who isn't active, in terms of ministry, ever has an opportunity to provide the sacraments for a person who is in danger of death, that he certainly would have the right to celebrate the sacraments there. I think that's an idea that deserves more attention than it really has received. So thank you for raising that question.

Question: Father, if you could, comment for us on the recent Vatican directive regarding gays in the seminary, and what you think might be the long term affect of that.

Answer: I wrote an article about the instruction and I'll comment on that in a minute but it appeared in *Commonweal* Magazine, and the heading was: *Sex in the Seminaries* – I think a take off of *Sex in the City*. (Laughter) But Tom is referring to a Vatican instruction that was issued, I believe, a year and a half to two years ago. It was an instruction; and that means it was a document directed towards bishops, seminary rectors and superiors of religious congregations.

The instruction stated that: "Candidates to the priesthood should not be admitted to the priesthood or to the seminary for training if they were active homosexuals or if they had strong tendencies towards the same sex or if they were active in the gay movement," as such, like Gay Pride movements. Now I think that the first characteristic is very defensible. I don't think any candidate for the priesthood should be admitted who says, "I'm not leading a celibate life right now," whether it is with women or with men. So the issue about the first characteristic for non-admission, I don't think, anybody has a problem with. I think, if a person is saying, "You know I'm not sure if I have the charism or not, but I certainly know celibacy at this time is required of the priesthood, and I think I can lead a celibate life." If the person is saying, "Gee, I'm going to enter the seminary on the third weekend of September, but throughout the month of August, I'm going to be traveling with my girlfriend or boyfriend, and we're having a full sexual relationship," that's very problematic. The second criterion is that candidates should not be admitted to the seminary for formation who have strong homosexual tendencies. Now, if I'm not mistaken, the Church says there's no problem being gay or straight. Most of us do not choose our orientation. You don't choose to be right handed or left handed – and I know that's not a good analogy – but a strong tendency could be a sign of health.

I mean, we don't want people who are asexual, because the passion for preaching the gospel comes from somebody who is in touch with the psychic energy that we can call *eros*. So, we don't want people who are sexually neuter. Having the charism of celibacy doesn't mean that you are not a passionate person; but it's the disciplined control of *eros*; and a person who knows how to integrate that energy, and who is honest enough to say that, "Yes, I am a sexual person." But, see, we can't even talk about that in the seminary today because, I think, you know, that the Catholic Church, when it comes to human sexuality, says there are no misdemeanors. When it comes to human sexuality folks, everything outside of marriage is a felony. (Laughter) When it comes to sex, it's either a sacrament or a sin. If I were to steal a candy bar from the local drug store, most confessors would say, "Well you shouldn't have done that, Don." But that's a venial sin. I don't know what candy bars are now, but when I was a boy they were five cents; today they're \$1.25, or whatever. But if I were to embezzle \$10,000.00 from my parish, I might be told, "Now that's a serious sin." You're talking about a sizable amount of money. But when it comes to human sexuality – and I've checked with moral theologians to make sure this is the official position – any deliberate – and I have to emphasize deliberate – sexual fantasy, desire or behavior outside of marriage, and within marriage, that isn't open to procreation, is not only wrong and immoral, it's a sin; and it's a mortal sin. So when it comes to sex there's no, what the theologians call *parvity of matter*, and that means, simply, smallness of matter. So you can make a distinction in the area of theft between a candy bar and a \$10,000.00 embezzlement, but when it comes to sex, if it's deliberate - now the Church isn't saying that, you know, a sexual fantasy or a sexual desire that kind of comes upon a person by surprise, now that's not certainly mortally sinful – but I think that you have to understand that you have to repress that.

Transcribed by:

Bev Parker

20061115