



# Into the Depths

## Beginning Seminary

by Michael Olsta

**W**ith the first month coming to an end, I can already tell that my decision to join the seminary will make a lasting impact on my life. While it would be unrealistic to say everything is perfect, I have had an incredibly positive experience. The struggle to grow in holiness is ever present, but the guidance I've been given continually challenges me. It's already brought an overall growth in my prayer life. The access to so many experienced priests and a library full of great works gives constant inspiration for contemplation.

As a diligent student, I knew I would enjoy going back to the books. Still, I think what I didn't realize is just how quickly I could take the philosophical and theological lessons in our studies into my prayer. There is so much to draw from in just scratching the surface of our relationship with God through his Creation or reflecting on the works of Plato. Our instructors range from priests to lay professors, so their differences in experience makes each class unique. Even when the material becomes difficult, it only helps build our fraternal bond out of that shared struggle and our support in study and work.

Much of Mount St. Mary's draw also comes from the great environment it creates. The Immaculate Conception Chapel is an absolutely beautiful church, with detailed stained glass windows and beautiful altars. We're blessed to have Mass every day inside it. We're also blessed to have the National Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes a short (albeit high) stair climb away from us. The grotto is the perfect place to pray the rosary. As a nature lover, I find great contemplation in just soaking in the sounds of the babbling brook and the multitude of wildlife that are in the forest around the grotto.

Our fraternal living has also been incredibly

rewarding. Our daily prayers are a constant reminder of our shared purpose as men seeking God's will in our lives. While no two men are alike, this guiding



force makes relating to each other easy. This is especially true in our years. Spending at least three or four hours in class together, you quickly learn everyone's personalities. With so many brothers together, it also means that there are plenty of different opportunities for relaxation in our free time.

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# What's New?

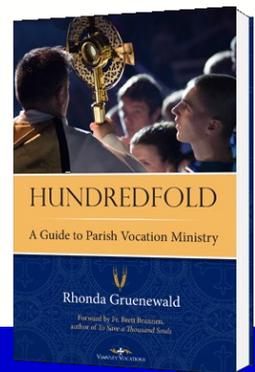
Hopefully you are following our Facebook page (Facebook.com/FollowMePeoria) and our website (comeandfollowme.org) to see all of the latest updates, videos, blog posts, and events. We've got a new video for featuring seminarian Danny McShane and his parents, who talk about their initial concerns regarding their son entering seminary, and how those have been resolved as he has gone deeper into God's will for him. This is an excellent video to share with parents, grandparents, and other family members. Twenty-nine percent of

our seminarians and young clergy say that their families discouraged them from entering seminary. Half of them said that their family was concerned that they wouldn't be happy or they would be throwing away their education or career. If we want to continue to create a culture of vocations, the family must be the primary focus, especially parents. The way we do this is by showing parents how happy and normal our seminarians are, and how their own parents' fears and concerns have been answered. The good news is that the majority of parents *do* have

their concerns resolved. They simply want their son to be happy, and when they see that he is, they too are happy.

We are also excited to announce that our Carton Scholarship Fund is now able to provide every college seminarian with *at least \$9,000* toward tuition, room, and board. It will continue to help those men who have greater need, as well as pay off loans for newly ordained priests. As we near

Thanksgiving, we are particularly thankful for our Carton donors who make this possible, and we hope to continue this success with future dinners. For more info on the Carton fund, Contact us at 309-671-1550.



## The Harvest

by Fr. Timothy D. Hepner

Fall is a great reminder of what I love about the 26-county space of land in central Illinois called the Diocese of Peoria. The ubiquitous tractors, combines, and grain wagons are signs of the hard work that reaps what it sows, and the rewards of patient, meticulous trust. Even though the percentage of central Illinoisans who farm has steadily gone down as equipment and farming practices have become more efficient over the years, I still believe there is a close connection between the land and the people here. In my travels I meet a lot of humble, gracious Catholics who have their ancestors' genes for hard work and faith. And the harvest is a symbol of all that.

November is traditionally the month in which we pray for the dead, visiting cemeteries and writing their names in the books of the dead in many parishes. The saints will tell us that it's also wise to meditate on our own mortality, not in order to be dour and morbid, but in order to lead our thoughts toward what truly matters: the harvest at the end of our lives. As days shorten and the frost moves in, we can reflect on the finitude of our time on earth and ask, "What will I place before God at the

evening of my life?"

If this seems dark, it's only because we lack faith. When we admit our mortality, we are freed to move on to the good news: God is merciful. He *wants* to help us produce fruit in our lives. He *wants* to see us in heaven, enjoying the rewards of a life spent in fidelity, prayer, and sacrifice. So he provides us with his grace to make us successful, to help us to be "rich in what matters to God" instead of filling up our storehouses with things that will rot and fade away (cf. Luke 12:13-21).

But what does this mean *practically*? It means that, every day we should be continually examining our lives and stripping away those things that won't matter on the day we meet Jesus: petty grudges, time-wasting activities, worry, unnecessary preoccupation with comfort and pleasure, and — most of all — sin. All of these are the unwanted chaff that will be separated from the grain, which is the offering we give to God that becomes "a sweet-smelling oblation to the Lord" (Leviticus 2:2).

But what does that leave us with? What is the "grain" that we offer God? It is our prayers, works, joys, and sufferings.

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## Hundredfold Vocations

**What it is:** An event to equip Catholics to form vibrant Vocations Apostolates that promote marriage, priesthood, and consecrated life in their parishes.

**When it is:** Saturday, January 21st, 9am to 2pm

**Where it is:** St. Jude Catholic Church, Peoria

**Who should go:** Laity, religious, permanent deacons, teachers, DREs, youth ministers—anyone who wants practical tools for promoting vocations

**Cost (including lunch):** Free! (Donations accepted)

**Register/More info:**  
comeandfollowme.org/workshop  
(309) 671-1550

# Passage to Pray With:

## AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH...

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. ~John 1:1– 5:12-14



## Harvest cont’d.

It is the joy we have at sacrificing ourselves for God and others. Our harvest is the satisfaction of knowing that the things we do in this life — raising children, praying for others, serving our parish, teaching the faith, serving the poor — these things will last forever. Our harvest, ultimately, is love. That is what we offer to God in the evening of our lives.

Each of our offerings will differ according to our vocations. At the end of my life, I pray that I will not only see Jesus, but also the hundreds of people I’ve baptized, the thousands I’ve given communion and whose confessions I’ve heard. I want to see those people whom I’ve anointed and whose hands I’ve held as they take their final steps into heaven. Those who are married, who labor to bring Christian charity into their marriage and family and community, will have a different harvest: their children, spouses, and friends who have been welcomed into heaven will welcome them in turn. I imagine, also, that religious men and women will see a much more abundant harvest in heaven than they could imagine, considering all the lives that they affect.

But you who are reading this, will, I believe, have a particular type of harvest to offer the Lord. You will have vocations that you’ve encouraged through your prayer and support. And you’ll have the people who were effected by those vocations. Every person I anoint or absolve has my benefactors to thank—those people who prayed for me and paid for my seminary education. There are souls being saved by men who would not have become priests if a parishioner didn’t invite them, or a grandparent didn’t encourage them. These people share in that harvest of the priest.

Over and above all, though, we know that everything we have to offer God was first given to us by Him. We love him with his own love. We hope and trust in him with hope and trust we have borrowed from him. And our bodies, our minds, and all of our talents were first given to us by him. So our offering isn’t something that can earn us heaven. We might plant, or water, “but neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7). So our offering is really an offering of thanksgiving—a *Eucharistia* (Psalm 116:17). As we see the harvest, the Thanksgiving table, the shorter days and the empty fields, let’s let all this sink in: God expects a harvest, and we have one to give him. It’s our lives. Our vocations. Our thanksgiving.

## Quote for the Season

**“Today our Savior is born; let us rejoice. Sadness should have no place on the birthday of life. The fear of death has been swallowed up; life brings us joy with the promise of eternal happiness. No one is shut out from this joy; all share the same reason for rejoicing...**

**Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God’s kingdom. Through the sacrament of baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ. . ~ St. Leo the Great**

## THE LIFE OF PRAYER:

“It certainly seemed that God wanted to give the world the impression that it is ordinary for Him to be born of a human creature. It’s true. God did mean it to be the ordinary thing, for it is His will that Christ shall be born in every human person’s life and not, as a rule, through extraordinary things, but through the ordinary daily life and the human love that people give to one another.

We are not asked to do more than the Mother of God—surrender all that we are, as we are—to the Spirit of Love in order that our lives may bear Christ into the world. That is what we, also, shall be asked.

There is in every human heart, be it the heart of a man or a woman, an empty cradle, waiting for the birth of Christ to fill it. Those who have Him, those in whom He is born again day after day, have just this one work to do, to show the others that what they want, what they long for, is Christ.”

~A Carmelite Sister of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles (originally from *spiritualdirection.com*)

From movies on weekends to pick-up soccer and basketball, to pool or ping pong in the rec room, you're sure to find something that appeals to you. I've especially enjoyed the time I've gotten to spend with the other seminarians from Peoria. Between eating breakfast together nearly every weekday and the many weekends hanging out and messing around at dinner, I truly feel like I am with brothers.

If anyone reading this has thought about making a deeper discernment into God's will in his life, I guarantee the search will not leave him wanting. Even before I was officially accepted by the Diocese, my discernment saw fruit in my life. Greater attendance at daily Mass and adoration gave me a greater appreciation of the sacraments. I could see how my constant pursuit of God's call to holiness was strengthened by the time I spent with the men and women I met through things like the Knights of Columbus, and young adult bible studies. The fact that seminary has already let me grow even

more so is a testament to its aid in deeper discernment, and a constant reminder of the power of God's love in my life.



*Michael Olsta is a first-year seminarian in pre-theology for the Diocese of Peoria.*

# FOLLOW ME.

Everyone is called to something. What's your calling?

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