

GOLDEN JUBILEE
Joseph C. Henchey, CSS
March 27, 2006 – Blessed John 23rd National Seminary – Weston MA

We have just reached –and we just passed – that Sunday in Lent when the Church invites us to rejoice: **Laetare!** We have great reason to rejoice as we gather to celebrate 50 years of distinguished priestly service for our friend, Fr. Joe Henchey.

So, we come together here at Blessed John 23rd Seminary to pause and celebrate as we recall these 50 years. How blessed we are to rejoice with him in this community, a place filled with the promise of men who are looking ahead to years of priestly service, a place with so many men who are looking for priestly examples to follow. I can also add that I am blessed because one of the Priests assigned to our parish in Norwood [St. Catherine of Siena] is a member of the first class ordained from this Seminary. He is terrific! That is why it is always such a joy to be back with this Community, a place that has been blessed to claim you, Fr. Henchey as a much loved faculty member and spiritual director.

Today, we are surrounded by distinguished priests and honored guests, including Archbishop Timothy Dolan, of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee – and Archbishop Vitti, CSS from the Archdiocese of Curitiba in Brazil. [Archbishop Dolan did mention that this was the first time that he had received an invitation that had footnotes!] It is also true is that we have been looking for a reason to get Archbishop Dolan to visit because some of us spent so many happy years together in Rome, [Joe, Connie McRae, Monsignor Mike Curran]. Well, this is the right occasion. Would you join with me in extending a warm welcome to all our guests?

My task is relatively simple: sum up 50 years that would have been impossible to predict, or imagine – made easier because Fr. Henchey has followed a clear pattern. In spite of uncertainties and challenges over these years – it is so refreshing NOT to speak about him! – It's all about the HOPE we have because Jesus is our Great High Priest.

Since I have never hesitated to borrow from the rich resources available in people like Fr. Henchey and Archbishop Dolan, let me do some borrowing today. I have loved working with him as a priest. I've loved the way he presents the mysteries of faith, in the class room, in his preaching, and in the witness of his life.

One of these stories was about the days when you were a youngster, Fr. Henchey, and your family used to go and sit on the sea wall in the evening, and if they would be very still and very attentive, then at least one of them would be able to see Ireland! Remember that story?

I don't know if you ever succeeded, but maybe if we sit still today and pay attention today, possibly we will be able to see the way your priesthood has helped us actually to see things that other people have not been able to see, or to experience what the First Letter of John begins with:

What was from the beginning, what we have loved, what we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands – concerns the Word of life, for the life was made visible. We have seen it and testify to it, and proclaim ... the eternal life that was with the father and was made visible to see...

That's why we are such sacramental people. We have seen and can testify what you, Fr. Henchey, have helped us to see. From the rich array of things that you have taught us and helped so many others to see, may I suggest one facet of the mystery of Christ?

You are indeed a priest. So am I. So are many of us. You are also a proud member of the Stigmatine Fathers, a religious with a special charism. Blessed John 23rd Seminary has always been enriched by the blending of the wonderful traditions of religious and diocesan priests, working together on this faculty, as we did in Rome. Here in Weston – Stigmatines, Franciscans, Jesuits, Marists, have generously shared their charisms with generations of us who are equally proud of our special charism of diocesan priesthood.

We have always known how much you esteemed and encouraged this charism with so many men whom you have prepared for diocesan priesthood. Seeing that in you and in your priesthood has helped all of us – your own Stigmatine Community, whom you have loved and served so generously. The Seminarians in Rome, the men from all over the United States, whom you have guided here at Blessed John Seminary and those whom you will continue to guide at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago.

We need to see that kind of witness in the challenging times in which we live. We need the simple and powerful lesson that it's not about you, or me! It's all about our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. That's never been in doubt as we look at your example, Fr. Henchey. Seeing your faithful dedication for 50 years has strengthened what we have seen with our eyes, and touched with our hands, the Word of life.

So, thank you, Fr. Henchey. Thank God for such a gift. That's what we are doing here today.

May you continue to provide such witness for years to come. The witness that is summed up in the classic phrase we heard so often in Rome:

***Sia lodato Gesu' Crist! Sempre sia lodato!
[Praised by Jesus Christ! May He always be praised!]***