

Why is the seminary experience feared? Those who feel called to the priesthood can sometimes develop cold feet as the reality of seminary sets in. Fears can rise up in many different areas.

We can begin to be fearful because we may ask:

- Are we talented enough?
- Will I fall for former sins?
- Will I be hypocritical because I hope to live a holy life but am still struggling with my sinfulness?
- What are the people like at seminary?
- Can I really leave all my friends and family?
- What are other people going to think?
- Am I smart enough?
- Can I really pray that much?
- Does God really need me?
- Can I really be celibate?

These and many other questions can enter into one's mind during that often long time of waiting to enter the seminary. It truly does take a leap of faith to enter seminary. But I can promise you that what God gives to those who are willing to plunge into this experience is quite amazing.

The word seminary comes from a Latin word that refers to 'planting seeds'. As one knows a seed can only germinate and become a plant if it is willing to die in the soil. But if it does this that seed can grow and grow and maybe even become the tallest tree in the woods. We are like that seed. And God calls us to die to ourselves, to embrace his will, and to plant ourselves into his seedbed of the seminary. From this God can tend our souls and prepare them for the awesome ministry of his holy priesthood.

In nature does it matter if a seed is big or small, rough or smooth, long or short? Not too much. In every case a seed normally has the potential to grow into a plant. Likewise we enter seminary as a broken seed. But God can take that brokenness and make it beautiful. In fact our brokenness and weakness can be our greatest strength in the priesthood. That is how St. John Vianney can say that he is only a good confessor because he is a great sinner.

Therefore, we must try to not fear as we enter seminary. How is this possible? First of all, we need to try and develop a support structure of people who will give us encouragement as we pursue this calling. Perhaps if you are not already involved in your parish, try to do a few extra things. There are many good and holy lay people who will provide much wonderful support to anyone who is considering the priesthood. Ask for their prayers and their support. The second way is to bring your fears to prayer and to ask Christ to give you a deeper insight into why you are suffering so much in regard to a certain fear. God allows all temptations only for the greater good. Therefore, he is hoping that through this trial a deeper level of trust in himself can be fostered.

Ultimately the call to priesthood and also the universal call to holiness is a call to giving up our will so that we can be united with his will. The world tells us that to give up our will is equivalent to never enjoying ourselves. But I promise you that that is a huge lie. The surprise moments of love that God gives to those who are truly seeking him are endless. We can recall many times in our life where we have done something out of charity. Perhaps we have helped someone we did not know, fed the homeless at a shelter, built a house for a poor family. In each of these gestures we have given up our will and the joy received from that has lifted our soul.

The seminary life is like that. We are called to dig ever deeper into that seedbed of our soul and to discover how God wants to use us for the construction of his kingdom. As God calls us to increase our ministry and to overcome our fears, we sacrifice the control that we crave. But in return God blesses us with the joy of seeing our soul come closer to him. We see the gift he has given to us being shared with another soul.

So our fears should not drive us away from seminary. In fact they should do just the opposite because they are actually a call to dig deeper into the seedbed of ourselves and to discover the true essence of our vocation. Our fears open up to us our weakness that we need to bring to God for healing. In the end the call to pursue/not to pursue a vocation to the priesthood must be rooted in peace not in fear. This decision only comes to us after we have dug deep enough within ourselves to discover who God has made us to be.

May our prayers be united with our Savior, Jesus Christ!