

## **“COME TO THE QUIET”: MY FIRST WEEK IN THE SEMINARY**

While we could recall any number of **memorable** dinners we have enjoyed with family and friends over the years, typically we do not easily remember **breakfast!** And yet, I can recall with clarity the **first breakfast** I had after enrolling in the seminary **40 years ago** this past week. More on that later. While I was thinking about entering the seminary since my senior year in high school, for reasons still not entirely clear to me, I was **not quite ready** to sign on the dotted line. I felt the need to be **100% sure** of my vocation, which of course is **not required** of a college Freshman! Thus, I began my college days at the then College of St. Thomas. (It did not become a university until 1991). In October of 1981, I made a formal weekend Open House visit to the seminary—they called them “Live-In” weekends then—hey, it was the early 80’s! While there, a seminarian counseled me, “You don’t need to be 100% sure...are you **51%** sure?” That’s all it took. I immediately began my **application** process through the Archdiocese and “took the plunge.”

Since I was enrolled in classes, there was no hurry to move in mid-semester. The rector, **Msgr. Richard Pates** (later Bishop Pates) suggested I finish the semester and join in January. I agreed and was filled with trepidation. What am I doing? Was this the right decision? What about my **pre-Med** plans— may I stay on that track, while also a seminarian? Talk about keeping open one’s options! **Doubts** raced in my mind. But I **took the plunge** and moved in right after Christmas Break. We seminarians took our meals in the school cafeteria (called “dining halls” now!) and so dutifully on the first morning after arriving, I distinctly recall being at the cereal station when I encountered a high school classmate. We knew each other but were not exactly best-buddies. “John? Hey, I thought you were living at home. When did you move on campus?” “Today’s is my first day,” I replied. “Which dorm are you in? Ireland Hall?” “No,” I replied. “Which one,” he asked again? Well, actually I am in the **seminary**. “The seminary? Really? Hmmn...” And he simply walked away.

That was my introduction. No encouraging words— perhaps he was surprised, but most certainly he was **not impressed!** My insecurities were only magnified. At the end of that first week, the seminary had an all-day Saturday retreat. “How am I supposed to get my homework done,” I thought? **All day?** At one point, we were **remanded to our rooms** for an hour of quiet prayer— no talking. I procured my **Walkman** (yes, remember those?) and inserted a loose **cassette tape** that I had found in the lounge. It was by John Michael Talbot, a former rock musician turned Catholic songwriter. I hit the play button and the peaceful, reflective music started. The title track of the album was “**Come to the Quiet.**” It began, “Lord, my heart is not proud/Nor are my eyes fixed on things beyond me/In the quiet, I have stilled my soul/Like a child at rest on its mother’s knee/I have stilled my soul within me.”

It was an Augustine “Tolle lege” (“Take up and read”) moment. You may recall, the searching 31-year-old heard a child’s voice begging him to read, and randomly opening the bible, he read— “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh...” (Romans 13:14) Augustine gave in to God’s grace, allowing his heart to follow his head. He finally sought baptism. Now for me, it may not have been that dramatic, but after the cassette ended, I **felt completely different**. I was at **peace**; I gave up my resistance, vowing to enter into seminary **formation** wholeheartedly. While my fears did not dissipate at once, I recall “owning” my decision and reaffirming my desire to discern a vocation and **stop worrying** about what everyone else thought. **Forty years** have passed since that Day of Recollection. How could I have known what lay ahead, whether in my seminary

studies or more than thirty-two years of priestly ministry?

But isn't that the point? We cannot know the future, but we can **entrust** that **future** to the Lord. And that entrustment requires giving up our grip on our future; it demands that we **stop trying to control** every move, every decision, every contingency. "Letting go" frees us to be receptive to God's will. I am convinced that the Lord **continues to call** young men to the priesthood and that he does so right here, in **our** parish, among **our** families. I urge young people to open themselves to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, to let go and consider lives of service. **Do not fear** the world's judgment—**embrace** life's amazing journey with God.

In **January 1982**, a postage stamp cost \$0.20, a gallon of gas \$1.22, and the average price of a **new car** was still under \$8,000. We had high inflation (6.8%) then, only recently surpassed by our current economy! In that same month, AT&T's monopoly was broken up. "Late Night with David Letterman" debuted in February and **Chariots of Fire** (my favorite film of the year) was released in March. Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in early April, and in May, Pope John Paul II made the first papal visit to England since 1531! It was an eventful year in my life, truly **life changing** in many ways. God gives us the grace to say "Yes" in the moment, sustaining us on life's journey. Might God be calling you? Be not afraid! Please pray that God continue to bless **this parish** with vocations to the priesthood.

- Speaking of anniversaries, **Hank Aaron** was elected on the first ballot to the Baseball **Hall of Fame** on January 13, 1982, **40 years ago** this coming Thursday. Even in Cooperstown, he occupies rarefied real estate! Aaron received **97.8%** of the first ballot vote. To the **nine** Baseball Writers of America members who **voted against** him— what were you thinking? Career Stats: HR: 755 | BA: .305| RBI: 2297.
- In addition to the SPAM museum **Austin, MN** has another claim to fame! It was the birthplace of recently deceased football great **John Madden**. The man's career spanned decades as a coach, color commentator, and video game pioneer to name a few. While he was afraid to fly (he rode a bus everywhere!), he feared no opposing team, including the Vikings! Crushed by a score of **32-14**, we lost **Super Bowl XI** 45 years ago **today** and haven't been back since. It still stings!
- We are all aware of the rash of **car jackings** in St. Paul, including brazen attacks in broad daylight, such as in the Crocus Hill neighborhood! Seeing the **frightening video** of an elderly woman's purse snatching at Walgreen's, a mother recognized **the coat** (a gift from his grandmother) **and turned in** her own **son**, saying she **didn't raise** him like that. Good for her! He now faces charges in both incidents.
- I wish to thank **Jerry Adam** for his six-plus years of **faithful and dedicated** service as Director of Maintenance. Jerry is the "handiest" man I know. He can (and did!) fix anything! His love for this Cathedral is evident. As he closes this chapter of his life, I trust that God will continue to sustain him in the next.
- As we **close** the Christmas season, I thank all who assisted us. The crèches inspire, the **entire** campus was radiant with light, the music uplifting! Our sacristans, lectors, cantors and altar servers are simply the best! I am so blessed to serve here at the Cathedral.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector