**(1.5)**

**PASTORAL VISIT TO BANGLADESH**

**9-13 SEPTEMBER 2015**

**Mass in the Major Seminary**

***13th September 2015, Sunday, 7:00***

*Homily*

First reading: **Isaiah 50, 5-9a**

Second reading: **James 2, 14-18**

Gospel: **Mark 8, 27-35**

Dear Alumni, Superiors, Professors, and Collaborators,

Today my pastoral visit to Bangladesh is coming to an end, after having the opportunity of celebrating the twenty-fifth (25th) Anniversary of the creation of the Diocese of Rajshahi, meeting a lot of priests, religious and faithful, and having spoken to your Bishops, who guide with zeal the Local Churches in this country. You belong to such Churches and you are preparing yourselves to serve them through priestly ministry. I fervently wish the best for all of you so that after your vocational discernment, you may reach the goal of the priesthood, which, as Pope Francis said to the seminarians of the Leonine College, is not a career to become officials, but shepherds “according to the image of Jesus”. “*You, dear seminarians*,” - the Pope continued to say *– “are not preparing for a career to become officials in a company or office… You are becoming shepherds in the image of Jesus the Good Shepherd, in order to be like him and to act in His person amid his flock, to feed his sheep*”. He then adds: “*Do not be mediocre, not even bad shepherds*” (14.4.2014).

Addressing the various alumni in different Colleges in Rome (May 2014), he gave them four guidelines (4) which correspond to the four pillars of priestly formation: 1. Spiritual formation; 2. Academic formation; 3. Community life formation; and 4. Pastoral formation. The Pope explained that he cannot comprehend how a young person can become a priest with poor or even no spiritual formation. It would be a body without a soul, that is, almost dead. He also warned against being too intellectual, becoming intelligent doctors in various fields of studies but no so much shepherds: “*It is better to become priests than to be doctors*!”, he commented. He also explained that to become a good priest, a seminarian should have a human and communitarian experience. This is why community life in the seminary is so very important. It is supposed to help a seminarian not to become egoistical, self-referential, and closed in on his “clerical presumption”. It helps to avoid murmuring and to always let the truth arise. In the end, he emphasized that apostolic life, active missionary zeal, pastoral involvement, and closeness to people help to maintain a priest-shepherd disposition according to the heart of Christ that is faithful to the charism proper to men of God.

I find these counsels of the Pope to be very attuned with the Liturgy of the Word today, on this twenty fourth (XXIV) Sunday in the Ordinary Time: “*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it*.” (Mk 8,35).

Jesus was speaking to everyone, but particularly to His disciples, who were persons under formation, I would say, almost like seminarians, to whom He would entrust the evangelization and the leadership of the nascent Church when he departs. Therefore, these words offer great encouragements to all of you who are under formation.

In the second (2nd) Reading (James 2, 14-18), Saint James, as a Spiritual Father, says: Ok. Do you want to become a priest? Do you have faith? Show me your faith by what you do, and only then will I believe.

Finally, I would like to conclude these reflections recalling the words of the Prophet Isaiah that we heard in today’s first reading: “*The Lord God opens my ear*”. The formation period is precisely the time when the Lord opens your ear, that is, your heart and mind, to entrust you with the treasures of His Word and Grace. Take courage! The Lord calls you to a beautiful and generous adventure. Never lose the joy of this calling because this joy is the gauge of your vocation. Without joy, there is no vocation and a vocation without joy is already worn out.