

My First Year in Seminary: Open Heart Surgery

By Robert Williams, Pre-Theology I — Tulsa



What have I been learning so far in seminary? Besides some of the obvious things like philosophy, Latin, catechism, and how to get up early in the morning, the main thing that Jesus is doing is breaking my heart. He is breaking my heart open to my need for Him, breaking and chipping away at my heart's proclivity for self and the pride in my heart that values what others think of me over how I can love them. Jesus is breaking my heart from the "potential" and "talent" and "arrogance" that I have lived with for so much of my life. He is also gracing me with a heart that breaks more often, more easily, more entirely for a broken world. He is showing me His own Sacred Heart for the world and how it breaks and pains for all to know the Love of the Father.

LIFE AS A MISSIONARY

Before I came to seminary, I was a missionary with Saint Paul's Outreach (SPO) on college campuses. For four years, I saw first-hand what a lonely generation of Fatherless children looks like. My heart broke many times for them to know the Love of their Heavenly Father, to see the purpose, delight, and joy that God had made them for and the way He held them in His heart. I tried to communicate that to them. Sometimes they heard the cry of the Father's love for them through my efforts, words, talks, and praise and worship, but sometimes I think they received a lot more of me than they did of God's love.

I, like any young man, want to be known and loved, affirmed, respected. I want to know that I have a place to belong, where I could give my life away and it would be "worth it." I realize now how those desires affected the way I ministered to others, and that I was not much further along in my trust and love for God than the very students I sought to "lead" and "serve." I see now how a lot of my work was self-centered. Thankfully, my brokenness and ego were no match for the Lord and did not ruin all my efforts. To the contrary, "*We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*" (Romans 8:28). God called me to be on a mission, and I responded. In being faithful to that call, despite my failings, God worked a lot of good in my life and in the lives of the students I served.

ALONE WITH THE LORD

As a missionary, I started in little baby steps to give my life away to others. Inch by inch, bit by bit, God started to configure my heart with His. It was from this place that my thoughts of priesthood began to blossom. I craved time to be

alone with the Lord, to seek Him, study, pray, and learn the way of the Father's heart for the world. Like a young sailor who has never left the bay, I longed to learn the way of the waves, to become a sailor of the deepest waters.

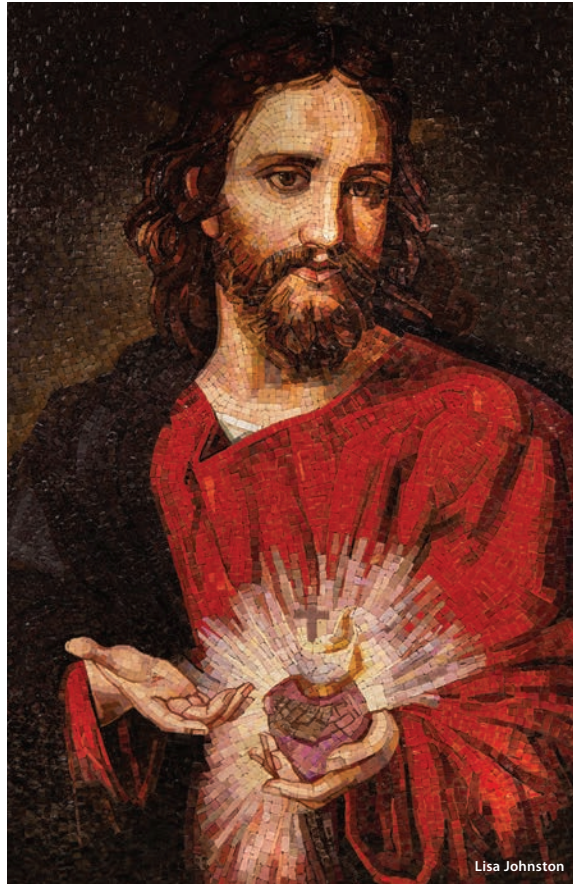
To learn the way of the waves requires going out into them. That was what seminary seemed to offer: a space to learn

more deeply the way of God the Father's heart. So, I applied and was accepted. Leaving SPO was hard. I had a lot of friends in the ministry and had witnessed God do a lot of miraculous things. At the same time, I was excited to follow the Lord into seminary, to make space to be formed — a free space that allows Jesus to deepen my interior life with Him — a desert of sorts. In the desert, I can be sure from where I receive nourishment. In the desert, there is no worldly success, no crowds to lead in praise and worship, no big talks to give, or meetings to run.

REVEALING HIS SACRED HEART

So now that I am here, what am I learning in seminary? I am learning that I can't impress Christ with my potential to be a great priest. He simply wants me to be a great son and receive His love. As I look to Him and see His eyes for the world, I begin to

ask Him what He is doing and who it is that He wants me to tell of His love. He pulls back His garment to reveal His own pierced Sacred Heart — a heart for me, the church, the lost, the lonely, the abused, the broken, and the persecuted. He asks me to love the world with His love, not to sell His love to the world by my talents. He asks me to simply and boldly share Who He is. The Lord holds His heart out to me freely. But this gift will cost me something, nothing I had a right to anyhow. He asks for only that which I have already been given - everything!



« The Lord holds His heart out to me freely. »

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HIS PRIESTHOOD

In return for His heart, He asks for my plans, my self-concern and self-consumption, my self-centeredness and my over-romanticized fantasy of the priesthood. He will take everything - the good and the bad. The good he will multiply a hundred-fold and the bad he will take upon Himself. He asks everything but what He promises in return is beyond compare. Reality! Truth! Mercy! Love! Perfect Love, Himself on a cross, His heart for the world – all of this he would share with me as a priest of His church, as a priest after his own heart, and as a man that humbly would receive the gift of His priesthood. Not my priesthood, but **His Priesthood!** My priesthood holds no power, only empty words, puffed up pride, things the world knows already too well, such that it has grown sick on the very thing I would offer them - the efforts of man.

What am I learning in seminary? Something I will likely keep learning the rest of my life: God is God, and I am not. I am learning the joy and freedom that comes with living in that Truth. I am learning how to live with a broken heart, which the Divine Physician replaces with His. I am learning to feast upon the presence of the Father's Love for me, a love seen in the gaze of the Son and received in the power of the Holy Spirit. I am learning that it can no longer be I who lives, but Christ who must live in me. There was, is, and only will be One Savior and His Name is Jesus Christ, not Robert Williams. ✚

INTRODUCTION TO SEMINARY LIFE

While seminary can be a place of grace and transformation, the transition for new seminarians can often be challenging. To assist men in this challenge, the seminary offered for the first time a Propaedeutic Seminar for college freshmen and Pre-Theology I seminarians in the 2019-2020 Academic Year. This seminar is designed to help seminarians learn the basics of seminary life as they step into a new world of formation. Examples of topics include:

- Time Management
- Liturgical Prayer
- How to Chant
- Intro to Liturgy of the Hours
- Boundaries & Breaks
- How to Make a Holy Hour
- Constructive Leisure
- Salvation History
- Spiritual Reading
- Discernment & Examen
- How to Make a Good Confession
- Leadership
- Fraternal Affirmation & Correction
- Study Skills

Aside from a half hour tour the summer before entering seminary, I had honestly no idea what to expect. The reality is that it is a tremendous place where men are truly being crafted into Christ, through Him alone, and every day is spent trying to fall in love with Him more and more.

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