

**Mass for Visit to Bishop Simon Bruté College Seminary
Thursday of the First Week of Advent
December 4, 2014**

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My dear brothers in Christ: just one week ago, our country observed the annual celebration of Thanksgiving. For many years, you could count on Thanksgiving as being one of the few days in which virtually everything was shut down. This enabled people to gather with their families and friends to enjoy time together and to reflect on being thankful for the blessings of the previous year. This relative calm slowly became an opportunity for bargain hunter to map out a strategic plan for getting deals the following morning at various sales on the biggest shopping day of the year, the day now known as Black Friday.

Over the past few years, this fervor of Black Friday has crept into Thursday to the point that many stores open their doors the evening of Thanksgiving, giving people yet another opportunity to get what they want at lower than normal prices. This trend is certainly disturbing, as it signals an eroding away of those times that we have in our lives to take a

step back and to slow down in order to focus on the more important things of life.

What is happening with Thanksgiving has been happening to Advent for quite some time. With just four weeks to prepare for Christmas, we try to pack in as much as possible in our workplaces, families, and schools. The Church encourages us to take this time during Advent to slow down, enabling us to more prayerfully prepare for the celebration of the birth of our Savior on Christmas. This is becoming more and more of a struggle in an increasingly commercialized society.

The Church has never been afraid of confronting the culture when it has strayed from the path of the Gospel, and Advent is no exception. Instead of giving in to the prevailing attitudes, we are called to remain firm in upholding the true meaning of this season. This is much easier said than done, for we ourselves are confronted with many things, many of which are good and holy, that pull us away from restfully embracing this season of preparation. Our starting point, then, for confronting the culture is by looking first at ourselves.

Here in the seminary, you are preparing for your final exams, something which requires a great deal of time and attention in order to

finish your classes well. Many of you will be active in your parishes and dioceses during these coming weeks, engaging in many good works and activities, but activities which create demands on our time. With all of these demands on your time, it can be easy to let some of your good habits of prayer fall away, often with the justification that you are exchanging one good thing for another and that your work can be your prayer.

Having this mindset can be harmful to our overall spiritual health. We cannot make compromises or justifications when it comes to prayer, for prayer is the needed foundation for us, regardless of our vocation. As we hear in the Gospel for today's Mass, having a firm foundation is essential so that when the storms of life arise, we will be able to weather them. It is therefore important for us to find ways of making prayer a central part of our day, especially when we encounter changes and interruptions to our schedule.

This is a critical time in your formation to pay particular attention to making prayer a priority. While ordination to the priesthood is several years off, it is never too early to work diligently on that spiritual foundation of prayer. Even if you discern that the Lord is not calling you

to the priesthood, the attention given to this foundation of prayer will be of great benefit to you as it is the foundation for all Christian vocations.

I encourage you, then, to put forth the extra effort of remaining faithful to daily prayer during this season of Advent, regardless of wherever your travels take you or whatever activities in which you participate. Your busyness will likely not decrease in the coming years of formation, and so the intentional effort that you put in now will prepare you to balance your various important works more successfully with that one most essential aspect of prayer.

After all, the most important thing that we can do to ensure that our ministry or our other apostolic works bear good fruit is to water the soil of our souls constantly with prayer. This will, as I said, provide a firm foundation so that when we encounter times of stress, difficulty, or even tragedy, we will not be overwhelmed, but we will be able to remain firmly grounded in that faith which has grown and developed in our lives.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist today, let us ask the Lord for the grace to resist those temptations to push our time of prayer aside in exchange for something else. By choosing to remain close to Christ in prayer each day, we prepare ourselves to more joyfully welcome Him into

our lives. We also prepare ourselves to be more effective instruments in the Lord's hands as we bring that joy to the people that the Lord will place in our lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.