

MESSAGE FROM THE RECTOR

Today's farewell is not business as usual – and not only because of our special guest from CTS Ft. Wayne: Prof. Pless, who gave such an insightful keynote address on the Lutheran Church and its mission. Yet again he was able to make it clear why it is such a privilege to be at such a confessional Seminary as ours – where we as Seminarians are so richly blessed with uplifting presentations, sermons and papers of such high standard and blessed content on Christian faith and life on a regular basis – not only week by week, but often day by day. All of us and especially our post-graduate students were again encouraged by Prof. Pless to delve even deeper into the rich treasures of our Lutheran Churches theology, exploring and bringing to light more and more precious resources for a faithful life in accordance with God's Holy word and Spirit here on this African continent. Thank you Prof. Pless for being with us and for all your blessings you brought along and leave so kindly. We also thank Pastor Gerald Paul and his congregation Trinity Lutheran Church in Great Falls for sponsoring his flight and for Dr. Carl Rockrohr and his wife – deaconess Deborah Rockrohr – for putting him up at their home for the entire two weeks taking care of all his needs in the best possible way. You made sure that Prof. Pless was very much at home by your gracious hospitality. Thank you very much!

There are some regularities in our program even today make no mistake. Saying thank you is one of these never ending stories at Seminary and it is my special privilege and honour to do that frequently. Primarily we join in the global thanksgiving to our Lord God in general, but also specifically for another very good year at Seminary! That's highest priority no question. That's why we daily intone the "Te Deum" during Matins: *"We praise You, O God; we acknowledge You to be the Lord..."* (LSB 223ff) and the holy words of the blessed virgin and mother of God in the "Magnificat" at Vespers: *"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my savior..."* (LSB 231f). Yes, if you read the daily postings of our Seminarians on the social networks you will see, how thanksgiving to the triune God is one of their most frequent exclamations. Like our Liberian students regularly answer in the daily greeting routine: "How are you?" by their grateful witness: "Thanks be to God!"

In our regular program today we also follow the same procedure as every year as we have good reason to thank the diligent and willing teachers, who serve so conscientiously and caringly throughout the past year: Tswaedi, Rockrohrs, Mntambo, Nkambule, Heyns, Oxton and my dearest wife Angelika. We thank Isolde Paul, who has jumped in at the deep end and is now even filling in for her daughter Birgit. We thank Salome Smith, who did such a wonderful work here over the past three years and has resigned as she is now in the last months of her pregnancy expecting a child early next year. May God bless and keep you and your child – now and ever more + We thank the many volunteers, who helped the Seminary in the past year from the LCMS: Lee and Pat Hoffmeier (Good Shepherd, SID) and from the SELK (LKM): 3x Dierks - Stefan, Rebecca and Jonathan from Immanuel LC (Gr.Oesingen, SELK) and Elke Studer. We thank the many guests, visitors and friends of the Seminary for the help, support and encouragement throughout the year! Lastly we thank also our students, who have prepared themselves so well for this day throughout the year by listening, reading, learning, thinking and writing more and more.

As every year students dress up smartly for this occasion. As its the first time we have deaconesses at this occasion, the dresses are a novelty and a stunning sight to see. Just look at the special dresses of Annie Toe, Ruth Nagbee and Helen Flomo from Liberia. If you know that these students can't come back next year due to the lack of funding, you can imagine at least somewhat, that these bright and shiny dresses are hiding some hurt and trouble underneath. That is why this years prize-giving is different to other years. Never before did we have to tell students from the Seminary that they would not be able to come back again the following year, because we don't have the means to support them here. That's what dampens our celebrations considerably. That's why we are trying to put on a brave face and follow our Lord's advice, who admonishes his suffering people: *"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting..."* (Mat 6:16 NIV). That's why Matthews Tokpah has put oil on his head and washed his face, so that it will not be obvious to men what he's going through, but only his Father, who is unseen. (cf. Mat 6:17f) In the same vain student Jefferson McGill has donned glossy spectacles. No way your gonna see any tears through there! Hard times, trouble and suffering, struggling along – yet they are singing the praises of Him, who has kept them going throughout and has provided all of us a very good year indeed. You heard them singing the song as a choir: *"Christ is our Lord and our strength. Therefore in His name fight the good fight."* You won't hear complaints, no blame games and no despair. Although there might be lots of reasons to resign and give up. I want to thank the students for this – especially the Liberian students. I am sorry that I was not able to raise sufficient funds in time to keep you here for the many years of study still ahead of you. You put a lot of hope in this your calling to study Lutheran theology so far from home at this Seminary here in Pretoria, where tuition is only a fraction of what it costs elsewhere, but the quality is not worse off. Still I disappointed you. Your hope in me and this institution was misplaced. Even if we run our institution on a shoestring, detractors would argue that even that little bit is wasted and not worthwhile and the value of our faculty is grossly overestimated. I disagree. I think this place is a gold-mine, a treasure cove and a oil-rig all in one – a place of priceless treasures. And every one of you students is most precious in this God's Seminary. None of you should drop out. None of you are not good enough. Every one of you has room and place in God's plans. The only reason, why some of you have been told not to return next year although your studies are not done and although you would love to come back again is because we on our side can't afford your travel, accommodation and supporting costs while you stay here. That's all. It's our failure. It's our shortcoming. Not yours! Therefore please forgive me and my failure.

This morning I saw a trailer posted on the www by the NYT: "Miseducation". The filmmaker Nadine Cloete explores childhood in a part of South Africa plagued by gang culture and violence. The little girl of 11 walks alone to school "in danger all the way" (LSB 716). Although I was overwhelmed by this filmstrip, I thought that this is not an option open for us as Gods people. Just some sympathy, just feeling sorry a bit – but all the while sitting comfortably on my chair – that's not good enough. Cowboys don't cry – never mind Bishops. Rather we in our most lovely and precious calling as pastors, teachers and bishops should heed what God tells us in his good, powerful and efficacious word as King David speaks to his son and successor Solomon: *"Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the LORD is finished."* (1Ch 28:20 NIV).

There is no room for emotional sentimentalities, not even fear or discouragement, no space for faithless worry and despair, for the Lord is with us: Immanuel! Therefore lift up your faces and look towards Christ – the author and perfecter of your faith. He has called you and he will finish the good work he has started in you. He is going with you – even as you leave us behind. He will not fail you nor forsake you until his work with you, with your Church in Liberia and the Lutheran Church in Africa is done, completed, fulfilled. Perhaps after our time yes, but surely he will do it in his time – and he will let us see it one day too. Then when all knees will bow before his throne and all tongues will confess that he our Lord is king of kings and God of Gods alone. Even if we will only see it from the heavenly spheres and in hindsight – it will happen as surely as he is faithful and truly does, what he promises. Let us continue with the temporary, preliminary and very limited work of ours as we are called and appointed to do. Doing it daily and faithfully. Knowing full well, that it is only our Lord and Savior, who grants growth, blessing and success – without any merit or worthiness on our part.

It is good that you trust far more in the living God, who makes the impossible possible, than in people like me. You know that you should not trust in men or even princes. You trust in the Lord and you know he is your good shepherd and even if goes through death's dark vale – he is with you. His rod and staff comfort you! He prepares a table before you and he anoints your head with oil and he sees to it that your cup overflows with grace and mercy! (cf. Ps 23:5) Yes, he will provide rightly and abundantly his grace and mercy even in your life and as you go forward under his care in his Church and mission. Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer and go through, for he the Lord is with you. He will bless and keep you, he will let his face shine upon you and be gracious to you, he will lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace + That is most certainly true!

And with this truth we are again back from the extra-ordinary to the very ordinary routine of our lives as Christians here at the Seminary and in his one, holy Church.

(The regular rector's report as PPP followed on the big screen.)