

Keynote Address
Bryan Massingale
Provincial Chapter, St. Xavier University, Chicago
7 June 2011



I thank you, John, for the invitation to come back home. Thank you, my brothers, for this privilege of being here as you begin your chapter. It is indeed a privilege and an honor to be here. I have to say I'm kind of a chapter virgin. This is my first time of being in a chapter experience. I have been in numerous diocesan priests assemblies. I've already noted that there are some differences.

First of all, you are much more familiar with each other than we are as diocesan priests. There's much more of a give and take among you. And you're not afraid of – while you are speaking – you got it wrong. We would never ever do that, especially to our ordinary or provincial, or a bishop in my case. Which leads me to the second difference I've noticed and that is you actually make decisions. You have made more decisions in one morning than I have in 28 years as a diocesan priest. You also choose your leadership, whereas we're in arranged marriages. "This is your boss. Okay. I guess we'll make this work". But the one thing you do have in common with diocesan priests is no one remembers what anyone said the previous assembly.

Having said all that, it is indeed a privilege to be with you this morning. I cannot describe the joy I felt when I first read John's email invitation for me to be present with you in this way, nor the speed with which I accepted the invitation. That doesn't often happen. I approach this time with you this morning with a sense of gratitude. Gratitude in a two-fold sense. First, gratitude for the many ways this province of Capuchins have been an integral and essential part of the story of black Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. I do not exaggerate when I say there would be no black Catholic community in that archdiocese without the pioneering presence and ministry of you.

Last night we had the installation and commissioning of a new black ministry in the archdiocese and I was present, and I told the story of the beginnings of black Catholicism. As I told the story and recalled your presence, I explained why the Capuchins were not present because they were here. People came up to me and told

me, you know, my parents were married by the Capuchins; I was baptized by the Capuchins; the Capuchins visited my son in jail. You founded St Benedict the Moor boarding school, of which my father was an alumnus. My father was not real keen on the whole priesthood thing. But when I told him I wanted to be a priest, he said, well, if you got to do it, wear a brown robe.

I still remember as a child attending St Elizabeth School, going to Mass, and having Fr Nereus visit our classroom, and being captivated by his long beard as a 2nd grade student. I want to especially signal the gentle presence of Fr Matthew Gottschalk. My aunts, even those who have long left the church, still tell stories of Matthew walking their childhood neighborhoods in his brown robe. He was their pastor even if they didn't belong to his parish. And more recently as the archdiocese has reduced their presence in the central city, the Caps have remained steadfast in their commitment to and presence at St Bens, St Francis, St Martin de Porres, and the House of Peace. My being here is a way of saying "thank you" for planting and nourishing the seed of the gospel in the African American community of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

My gratitude is also a more personal one. Over the years, many of you have graced my life as teachers, mentors, colleagues and friends. From Booker Ashe, who graced me with monthly hospitality as a seminarian and a young priest at the House of Peace, to Mike Crosby was my contact friar when I was a Capuchin pre-novice. From Ken Smits who was my professor and spiritual director; to Bob Smith and Andy Daniels, who were friends and companions in the reality of black men serving the church. From Marty Pable and Bill Cieslak on the faculty of St Francis Seminary; John Celichowski, Mike Bertram and Dave Preuss as colleagues in ministry, and many others besides. In so many ways, the lives of this province and its members have intersected with and graced my own. I am richer for this. My presence here is an act of thanksgiving, and it was with no hesitation that I accepted John's invitation with joy to be with you this morning.

Now after this paean of justly deserved praise you should be warned that in the Roman schools the *laudatio*, or the praise of the professor, precedes critique. And I would be very Roman this morning. I need to tell you my brother and friends that today's keynote is not an easy one to give nor, I suspect, will it be easy to receive and hear.

John's letter of invitation on behalf of your steering committee charged me, "to help us understand our experiences as a province within the context of the wider church and world." I was also told, "we want and need to be challenged". That was in italics. If you

don't like what you hear, remember you asked for it. And you also helped form me. So beware when those you minister to come back to haunt you. I also want to preface my remarks by saying my observations – I did not discuss my observations with any one of you, or seek your feedback, so as not to be co-opted or unduly influenced by any segment or faction, even though all the brothers are one – yada, yada, yada. My observations come from my own study, prayer and reflections upon your own documents and my experiences of your ministry.

There are three signal dynamics that are occurring in the life of church and society that I believe are signal signs of the times that not only call for a response from you as vowed religious men, but also in which you participate and which directly affect you. These three signal signs of the times are these.

The first, profound demographic shifts in religious leadership. Secondly, the collapse of the common good in civil society. Third, seismic transformations in a global church and in a national church that is rapidly becoming a microcosm of the world. Three signal signs of the times. Let me attack each one now.

First, profound demographic ...dynamic changes..in ordained leadership. After I read John's triennial report to the province and I studied your pastoral plan, I could not help but be struck by a stark reality. Like most religious communities and diocesan presbyterates today, you are older, grayer and fewer. Though each of your documents reports the numbers in different ways – I had to take each document and my mathematics hat and parsed it all together, and taking into account - I've come up with 165 solemnly professed friars – this is my best guesstimate how the numbers break down: 72 of you are over 75 years old, 44% of the total; 11 are between 71-75; 41 are between 65-71; and 41 are under the age of 65, of whom only 16 are under the age of 40. There are twice as many over 71 as there are under the age of 65. Only 89.5 members are available for active ministerial assignment. I wonder who the half member is.

I confess I sat with these numbers for about two nights, holding them in prayer. I know religious life is aging, but when I thought of how that impacts this province, people who have been such an integral part of my experience as a Catholic, they hit me in a new way.

In reporting these numbers I make no negative judgment on the ability and importance of senior members. Many of you are still active and engaged. Others contribute mightily by their prayers, witness and example, and yet as Christians committed to the reality of

the Incarnation, bodily limitations and physical diminishment are inherent to that Incarnational principle. To deny or gloss over bodily limitation and physical diminishment is not only unreal, it is also – and I use this word as the former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America – *heretical*.

I also noticed in your reports the presence of newer members. And I notice some of them are here, so I ask those who are in simple profession or novices or postulants to please stand. Yes – and applaud them. That was a welcome surprise to hear you have so many in simple profession. It is rightly a cause for celebration. And yet, your same triennial report notes that from June 2008 to June 2011 – and I updated this number – 12 brothers have died, 2 have left, 9 have made and remain in simple profession, 2 having left after professing simple vows. Thus, despite this wonderful influx the reality is undeniable and inexorable; the province is and will continue to become both older and smaller.

Your experience reflects the reality of religious life and ordained ministry today in the United States. It is estimated that 75% of vowed religious in the United States are over the age of 60, with only 3% under the age of 40. If misery loves company you should know that the Society of Jesus is in the midst of merging 10 US provinces into 5. To account for the fact that despite some recent vocational success, in 10 years they will only have about 55% of their current membership, and half of that will be over the age of 75. In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, only about 20% of the priests are under the age of 55. I'm still in that 20% even after 28 years. But less than 5% of us are under the age of 30, as I was when I was ordained at the age of 26. Almost every diocese in the US in the next 5-7 years will lose over a third of its active clergy. And that's a conservative best-case scenario.

This deep and unprecedented demographic shift has had, and will continue to have, profound implications on the life of the church in ways we can hardly imagine or anticipate. It has already deeply aligned parish life in this nation. Mergers, closures, shared pastorates, reduced numbers of masses compromised access to sacramental services. And despite official policies in many dioceses, like my own, that parishes will no longer be merged, brute demographic reality make such assurances acts of fantasy and delusion.

This province is not immune to such pressures. As your pastoral plan attempts to envision the surrender of ministries in light of your concrete reality and the limitations it imposes. But there is a further challenge that you as vowed religious face, that is not

shared by diocesan priests. Being older and smaller raises not only the question of the shortage of personnel, also the possibility of the extinction of charism. In the words of one authoritative study, barring some dramatic providential act, “the disappearance of priests, sisters and brothers from Catholic institutions will continue to its obvious conclusion, and Catholic institutions will continue to exist without any significant involvement of religious congregations.”

Already many Catholic service, educational and healthcare institutions have little existential connection to or awareness of the charism of their founding congregations. Rather than being specifically Alexian or Dominican, for example, these institutions espouse a universally more Catholic identity. And the lay professionals who staff these institutions have not, and in many cases cannot, internalize that spirituality and culture of the founding community. In many cases, the community’s charism is not compatible with the realities and demands of lay life. So the laity cannot be the bearers who nurture and sustain and pass on the tradition. We have yet to recognize, let alone tally, the loss to the church of these charisms and their witness.

This challenge that faces religious life in general faces this province in particular. As you continue to move into being a future province that is smaller and older, the question becomes – and I phrase this as gently as I can, but I need to say it as sharply as possible – what are you doing to make sure that the Capuchin Franciscan character of your institutions and ministries remains vital and living, rather than merely notional and historic? How are you passing on your distinctive charism to the laity who must *de facto* become the bearers of that charism if it is to endure? I’ll talk about that toward the end.

As a study of Catholic institutions forthrightly notes, quote, if these institutions want a non-secular future they must construct serious and sustained formative experiences for lay people who take over, unquote. This goes beyond what’s usually called hiring for mission. Rather your employees, your volunteers, even your benefactors have to now become, in a way that was not true before, *your partners*. Now I know this is a neuralgic issue for you. I went to the website and I read the proposals. I know there’s a resolution pending about this for this at this chapter, and I know there’s no common mind among you about what *partner* means. So be consoled, this is an issue for the entire US church, one that I fear most lack the courage to name, much less address. Again, in the words from the Catholic Institution Study, “the largest loss Catholic institutions experience as congregation members disappear is the loss of witness.” The most critical question for the future of the unique cultural identity of most Catholic institutions in the United States, therefore, is how to create witnesses without religious congregations. So much

for the first of the signs of the times that impact you and in which you participate. I did warn you that this would be hard to hear and receive. Right? You're being real quiet right now. I'm sorry about that.

Let's move on to something happier, the second sign of the times, the collapse of the common good in civil society. Something light. I think everyone can agree there's a general atmosphere of anger, resentment and meanness that marks our common life and our public square. Almost every discussion of social issues becomes adversarial and contentious as people hasten to assume the worst motives of those with whom they have policy disagreements and differences. One sees this, for instance, in the debates over health care reform and immigration. "Keep America for Americans" trumps any appeal for humane and compassionate treatment for families. Cries of "socialized medicine" – dare I say *Obamacare* – drown out legitimate differences over how to provide a basic minimum of health care for all and repair a system that benefits very few.

But going underneath this anger, I believe that the meanness of our public life is a sign of deep anxiety and fear. Many in the United States, especially in the white middle class, are anxious and fearful concerning their fortunes and those of their families. I don't know if you saw the recent *Newsweek* cover story of April 25, 2011, the cover story on the beached white whale, subtitled "He had a big job, a big office, and a big bonus – how he's all washed up and doesn't have a freaking prayer". This fear stems from a sense of fragility and vulnerability rooted in the current economic crisis and disappearance of living wage jobs, the collapse of the housing market, and thus many people's financial security. The disappearance of 401-K plans to retirement savings, the insecurity of present employment – am I next to lose my job? The constant drumbeat of grim economic news despite sunny assurances that the worst is behind us, stock market rallies, although that may have been a premature forecast. All of this leads to deep anxiety, fear and vulnerability that causes people to turn inward, to take care of me, and it also leads to a sense of resentment as others or 'those people' are threatening competitors for an ever shrinking piece of the American pie, when there's also the basic fear there's not enough to go around.

Americans have historically opened the doors of opportunity only during times of economic expansion. Economic contraction and uncertainty, on the other hand, bring out latent tribalism and racism that are never far from the surface. And then we wonder why folks don't read our concern for immigrant immigration reform with compassion and excitement. Compounding all this is a dearth of public leadership and decline of

genuine statesmanship among the leaders. Seemingly gone are the days when politicians could rise above short term electoral interests and act for the good of the nation. Instead public leaders are increasingly representatives for narrow partisanship and...interests, or servants more beholden the corporate interests, for example, Wall Street bankers, the insurance industry, or to the Koch brothers, than to their electors. Complicating this is the hypocrisy on the part of non-elected public figures who seduce the frightened and vulnerable with manipulated, calculated and feigned populist outrage pocketing six-figure speaking fees posing commitment to the aggrieved middle class. Note their rabid cause of take back our country, especially when a president allegedly harbors, quote, racial anger against white people, and is bent upon destroying the country. Does that recall anyone's name (Glenn Beck). Hypocritical profiteering, partisan ideology, political demagoguery have made the public square increasingly hostile and dysfunctional.

This province has had a long and admirable commitment to justice and peace. But the meanness of the public dialogue, the deep anxiety on the of the previously privileged, the callous indifference of corporate profit seeking, and the ruthlessness of unbridled individualism — note the resurgence of Ayn Rand — make this a fundamentally different commitment than when you first embraced it in the 1960s and '70s. For today it is increasingly difficult to speak about a common good and much less appeal to a sense of common purpose. That's the second sign of the times, which I think impacts your experience and puts it in a wider context.

The third sign of the times, seismic transformations in a global church. Seismic — where to begin with this one? Let me speak in terms of these signs of the times in the church in terms of racial and ethnic transformations and the paradox of spiritual justice seekers who see the church as institutionally irrelevant. First, racial ethnic tensions, what I call the 'browning of the church.' This is the term I use to describe the facts that, one, the vast majority of the Catholic Church now lives in the southern hemisphere, and two, the majority of Catholics in the United States are no longer white Anglos. The apostolic nuncio at a conference on "Called to the Diversity of the Church" at Notre Dame this past May broke the news to the assembled people that white people are no longer the majority of the Catholic Church in the United States, a realization that has not yet filtered down into the pews, I suspect. Last year, the National Religious Vocation Conference's study of young religious showed those in initial formation today are more likely to come from non-white and non-Anglo populations. For the past several years the number of newly ordained priests in the United States ranges from 25% to 35% non-white.

By God's grace, the church in the United States is now a microcosm of the world's peoples. In other words, we do not have diversity in the church, as an office of the USCCB is named, we *are* a diverse church. This means that religious communities are also experiencing major racial and ethnic shifts in their memberships. This has led to not a little tension and a felt sense of identity loss. Whose community is this? This was well expressed in a consultation I gave to a group of religious men who were experiencing tensions as younger Latinos were becoming more numerous in their community. One member candidly remarked and lamented, quote, we aren't a community of O'Brien's and O'Malley's any more, now we're Sanchez and Fernandez. This is not much different than the priest in my own archdiocese who, after an ordination where the majority of the newly ordained were foreign-born Hispanics, complained: "When are we going to get some of more *our* priests?"

Moreover, although the majority of its members are persons of color, the power of the Catholic Church still resides in the Northern Hemisphere, as evidenced in the predominance of Europeans recently named as cardinals. And the vast majority of US Catholic leaders, the Conference of Bishops, the members of diocesan staffs, the senior executives of Catholic agencies and organizations, the major superiors of religious orders, faculties of Catholic seminaries and educational institutions are white. In other words, despite the deep browning of the church, the Catholic Church and many communities of vowed religious, remain white institutions. And by that I don't mean just really the complexion of the members, these institutions remain white as they are at times marked by the pervasive belief that European esthetics, music, theology and persons, and only these, are standard, normative, universal, and truly Catholic. Only European persons, theology and esthetics are truly Catholic despite the church's actual demography and rhetorical commitment to universality. The challenge, to put it bluntly, is this: white faith communities are not and cannot truly be Catholic, much less fraternal. This is a challenge that faces the entire church, including this province. The difficult acknowledgment of both its captivity to what has become an idol of whiteness, and the need for a conversion to a genuine cross racial solidarity that will enable us to actually become as well as profess to be a Catholic faith community. In your own ways you in this province also face this challenge.

The second sign of the times in the global church is this, the commitment to justice and spiritual seeking amid institutional irrelevance. Anecdotal reports and research evidence show a recent resurgence of genuine commitment to justice for the sake of the impoverished among many white, middle-class college students. One of the joys I have of being an undergraduate teacher of theology is I meet some of the most amazing

young people. More and more are exploring programs such as the Peace Corps, Teach for America, PACE – which is the Catholic Teach for America – the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and your own Cap Corps. Your experience of the idealism, enthusiasm and spiritual hunger of these volunteers is not an isolated phenomenon. These young people are a fertile ground for passing on your Capuchin Franciscan charism and values.

That's the good news. However, this generation is also marked by institutional estrangement from the Christian churches – note I said, plural, *churches*. Recent surveys of a group called the Barna group which focused on white evangelical young adults between ages 18-30, and the public religion research institute which focused on young adult Catholics between ages 18-29, show a high interest in social justice, and it's connected to faith, along with a higher proportion of religiously unaffiliated members as compared to other generations, and a deep skepticism concerning institutional religion. I cite the Public Religion Research Institute research. This generation generally has a more negative than positive association with religion and Christianity in particular. The young people we interviewed most frequently mentioned "being anti-gay and judgmental" as key attributes that turned off younger adults of contemporary churches. Many of these millennials talked about LGBT equality as a kind of litmus test for evaluating churches.

I teach a course at Marquette University on liberation theologies. We talk about gay liberation theology, and I have them also read 3 of the 4 Catholic documents dealing with the church's teaching on homosexuality. Even my conservative, most religiously faithful and orthodox students read the church's documents and react with anger, shock, even disgust. As one person said to me, "I can't imagine Jesus ever talking that way, even to people he called sinners." That then led one of them to raise his hand and asked me, "Fr Massingale, you seem to be really intelligent and really smart, so why are you a priest?" I'm not used to people asking that question, never phrased in quite that way. So I said, hmm, why would you raise priesthood as if it were opposed to being intelligent and smart? And, boy, did they let me know. All I hear about when I go to church are all the ways you can be a bad Catholic, if you think a certain way, or vote a certain way. The priest at my parish never talks about anything that's real. One of them said, you talk about this inclusive table fellowship of Jesus; I never hear that in the pulpit. Another said, I take your course and we study the whole gospel of Lazarus, the rich man and Lazarus, and so it was read in church I said, "Oh, this is what the priest is going to talk about." He didn't mention anything. He preached the whole sermon and didn't mention the poor once.

The good news is that there are fertile opportunities for creative partnership with young volunteers in your life and ministry. Many espouse a deep commitment to social justice and they want it to be informed by faith, but they are profoundly skeptical about our church, which means that hopes of a deluge of new vocations from this demographic – at least in numbers sufficient to turn the tide of diminishment and loss – is highly unlikely.

Three signs of the times, three dynamics that impact your ministry, your life as a province. I'm tempted to sit down right and say, Okay, John, I've done my job, I've challenged you.

It's tempting to sit down and end this presentation except that as I sat with this reality, and sat with my experience of you, I realized there was something more I wanted to say. And I offer this tentatively and hesitantly as it's a new insight that's becoming clearer to me, and that I rewrote last night as I thought about it. As I pondered these realities, I asked myself the question: what could I say to you as you face these realities, because I, too, am caught up with them; and I, too, grope for clearer light and insight. I, too, face the reality of being among the younger members who struggle with affirming a connection to a group undergoing seismic transformations and deep transitions.

As I sat with this, these things came to me. There are two dangers or temptations that arise in times of transitions. The first is that of nostalgia, which is essentially a kind of denial. Nostalgia denies that a loss or change is happening, and at best minimizes the impact of what changes cannot be dismissed. People who are in "nostalgia mode" say this will pass. It's only temporary. I actually heard a bishop saying there's no shortage, we simply have a temporary mal-distribution of resources. If only we pray harder for vocations, if only we are more faithful or obedient, if only we put more personnel in vocation ministry – *if only, if only, if only*. With increasing desperation nostalgia attempts to cling to a way of life and faith that are no more.

The second danger or temptation is that of despair, a stance that says "all is lost." Why plan – there's no future here. Let's just resign ourselves to be smaller and older and grayer and fewer because after all, who's going to join us. If I were younger, I'd leave. Both nostalgia/denial and despair are ever present temptations in the church today. And I admit succumbing to both at various times. But there's another way to name our current situation as church and society, another way to name your experience as a province. I now believe and describe this current reality as a state of *evolution*. We are evolving as a church, as priesthood, as a nation, and I believe you are as a province.

Evolution – which St Paul speaks of as the creation of a new being. Let the province declare as a new thing. The prophet Isaiah says: do not consider the events of long ago, see I am doing something new. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it? Evolution captures for me both the crisis of undeniable diminishment, loss and irreversible change, and the hope that such endings, though painful and searing, are the break through to a new way of being, to a new way of living. Evolution embraces both radical discontinuity and fundamental identity, for one is no longer the same yet it is still the “I” that is changed.

Evolution captures the paradox of Jesus’ teaching: unless the grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains but a single grain. But if it dies, if it consents to its evolution, to its new being, it continues to exist in a radical new way. It experiences an abundance of life which it could never conceive of before. Let me be concrete. If what I am saying is true, naming your experience and the experience of the church as evolution make these things clear to me. First, the province and the church is not what it was, it will not be in 5 years what it is now, and it will never again be as it was. *It will never again be as it was.*

The second thing this makes clear to me is that if we cooperate with this grace, this dark grace, ala the dark night of the soul, I believe the province will experience a new being, deeply changed yet undeniably real. As I told my mother when she was dying – she resisted going into hospice. My mother was a champion denier. She was dying long before she accepted it. She went to get a second opinion, a third opinion, and fourth opinion. She would go to the hospital for a checkup. She suffered from degenerative lung disease. She’d come back and say: “Well, the doctor says there’s been no change in my checkup.” And I’d say “because last time there was nothing on the x-ray to see, and there’s still nothing to see.” She said: “Do you have to say it like that?” When I finally asked Mom – “Mom, why won’t you go in hospice? We can’t take care of you by ourselves any more. You need to do this.” She said “I feel if I go into hospice it’s as if I’m telling God he cannot work a miracle.” And out of the deep place I still cannot adequately describe, I told Mom - I said “Momma, I still believe God can work a miracle, but it probably will be one that neither one of us expects.”

That’s what I mean by evolution. And that’s what I mean when I name your experience as evolution. But that means we’re living in between the times. We’re living between the reality of loss and the promised future. We’re in what ritual scholars call a liminal moment. We’ve left one place, but we haven’t yet arrived at the next. We’re not quite

sure what the next will look like. It's a place that's frightening, and fearsome, and not an easy place to be.

So how do we live in this in-between time? I'm no expert, but I offer two words of advice. The first suggestion is this: *ritualize your loss*. Ritualize your loss. We need to mourn and grieve the loss, and acknowledge the pain of its passing. A way of life that is deeply loved is ending. That needs to be named and sacramentalized. I don't think that we men are real good at loss or grief. We usually have more of a can-do spirit. Fewer friars, fewer ministries. Let's get on with it. It's like saying – Mom's dead, have the funeral, let's get on with it. It's not that simple. Our identities are shifting and being stripped away, and we cannot move on unless we acknowledge the loss and surround it with the appropriate ritual and grief. Grief unacknowledged paralyzes. I heard this morning that you're not good at saying "goodbye." I believe as a province we need to say goodbye. *Goodbye* to the way the province was. *Goodbye* to a way of life that cannot be again. Otherwise you'll remain stuck in nostalgia and denial, and the new thing cannot come, or at least will come only on ways of despair.

The second thing I invite you to do during this liminal time, this in between time, is to nurture your Capuchin Franciscan imagination. Recall that evolution embraces both fundamental continuity and deep change. One's archetypal values will continue to endure though in ways they'll be radically different. This is a time for discerning and sharing your Franciscan imagination. When that phrase Franciscan imagination came to me, I Googled it to see what I could find. And there ain't much there. I'm not going to tell you what to do with that. Franciscan imagination – what do I mean by that? I mean a particular school of reality, a way of understanding life that came into existence with Francis and Clare, and has continued for hundreds of years though in ways Francis and Clare could never have anticipated.

What is this Franciscan imagination? I'm not Franciscan, but when I think of the Franciscan imagination this is what comes to me, what I find compelling. His embrace of the leper, the one that everyone including him feared, despised and stigmatized. His willingness to risk becoming a leper and one of the despised. That's powerful. The second part of the Franciscan imagination is Francis' praise of creation, his contemplative grasp of the grandeur of God in creative reality. That creation is not merely or solely for our own use or exploitation. The third part of our Franciscan imagination – at least that appeals to me – is fidelity in rebuilding the church. A fidelity that acknowledged that the church had fallen into ruin, and yet he didn't see that crisis as an excuse to cut and run. I tell you right now, as someone who looks at the church

sometimes with a jaundiced eye, Francis haunts me with this summons to rebuild the church even in this dark ecclesial night.

And the final part of the Franciscan imagination I ask you to cherish is his celebration of Lady Poverty. I must confess I'm haunted by this and I don't know what to do with poverty. I remember being a Capuchin pre-novice, and Mike Crosby telling me if I became a Capuchin I'd have to give up my books and my library to become communal property, and that was the first part of saying "hmmmm," and yet - especially now that I hear you guys have TVs and computers in your rooms (I should have stuck it out). And yet Francis' call of non-violent possession in a world of military consumerism, that speaks to me. These values – embracing the leper, praise of creation, rebuilding the church, and celebration of Lady Poverty, they will endure in that new future to which we are evolving, but only if you have the courage to embrace them, and celebrate them, and share them with us, and make those of us who are not Franciscan your *partners* in keeping the Franciscan dream alive. You can only do that if during this in between time you have the courage to nurture and celebrate this Franciscan imagination. And I believe that you can do this.

At Mass this morning, as I watched the province file up to receive communion, tears came to my eyes – and I don't cry in church – well, sometimes I do but it's usually because of what the presider or preacher is doing – but tears came to my eyes as I watched you come forward, those I know, those I've heard of. Tears of the young people who are committing their lives even in this time of uncertainty. Tears at the procession of the gray hair that witnesses courageous fidelity. Tears at the obvious, palpable holiness that I see and feel in you. Those tears give me profound hope, and I share them with you so that you may have hope, that as you continue in this evolution that we are all undergoing from one cherished way of life to one that is yet uncertain and unclear, remember the giftedness that is in this room. See the gift that you are. Cherish who you are. And thank you for gracing my life with your witness, your ministry and your holiness. Thank you.