



SOCIETY of OUR LADY
of the Most Holy Trinity

gray robes

SPRING 2019





Perseverance, Resolve and Hope



Dear Friends and Benefactors of SOLT,
Peace be with you!

We have come to the end of yet another year in the lives of the SOLT Brothers in formation, as they continue to confidently move forward in the love of Jesus for them and for His Church. This year of growth took place beneath the shadows of scandal and confusion in the Church, along with the beginnings of purification and rectitude.

In mid-September, I was able to preach a mission appeal on behalf of SOLT formation, which fell immediately after some of the most impactful and shocking reports of abuse were released. It was daunting to solicit support from the people of God and ask them to participate in the mission of the Church, when we were all so stricken by outrage, anger, and disillusionment. Ready myself for the appeal, it occurred to me that the Lord had begun preparing the remedy for his Church even before the sickness was known, the wound lanced. I saw in the SOLT brothers in formation men firm in their resolve to serve the Lord. Their confidence in Jesus' stability and faithfulness to his Church, and in the Father's hidden providence to purify and heal even in the midst of horror and tragedy, was evident and inspiring. I noted that from this generation of priests and brothers was being asked a double-dose of courage: courage to respond to a call, leave home and family, and set out on a path of total dedication to and imitation of the Lord; and courage to step into a Church whose face was marred, whose illness was still not fully known, whose sanctity was questionable. Theirs is a courage not asked of those who came before; theirs is a vocation to be the healing, the solution, the restored and renewed men of Jesus' call to manifest His fidelity, mercy and holiness.

Deacon Dave Brokke's perpetual promises and diaconate ordination brought with it a note of symbolism: a concrete manifestation of the continued "yes" to the Lord from all SOLT Brothers. Dcn. Dave's moving forward into the clerical state and being commissioned to serve in the Lord's vineyard, in some fashion has focused and inspired his peers in the ministerial meaning of their shared calling. He reminds them of their call to lay down their lives for their brothers. Watching him come to such a threshold has the spill-over effect to call to those behind to forge onward, to persevere. We are grateful for his yes and for the Lord Jesus' fidelity to preparing Dcn. Dave for fruitful and fulfilling ministry.

Enjoy the contents of this edition of The Gray Robes. Let us accompany one another in prayer,

In Christ,

GRAY ROBES FORMATION PROGRAM

PARISH ASSIGNMENT IN CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

Dcn. Dave Brokke (MD)

SACRED HEART MAJOR SEMINARY IN DETROIT, MI

Theology IV: Br. Timothy Burnham
(Canada)

Theology II: Br. Javier Ebertowski (TX)

Theology I: Br. David Snow (MO)

Philosophy II: Br. Joseph Spears (KY)

PERMANENT BROTHERHOOD IN MISSION

Year V

Br. Danny Tozzi (MS) - Detroit, MI

Year II

Br. Uriel López (Mexico) - Detroit, MI

NOVITIATE IN CORPUS CHRISTI

Andrew Rowedder (MD), Steve Bernal (TX)

ASPIRANCY IN BELIZE

Adam Schmitzer (OH), Blair Burton (CO),

Paul Pesek (TX)

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Christ or Nothing

Dcn. David Brokke, SOLT



Jesus or bust, Christ or nothing... I'm going all in!" This phrase popped into my head the night before the most life-changing weekend to date. I realized that my whole life essentially rests on the Resurrection of Jesus. It either has meaning due to Jesus conquering death or it doesn't, and I have seen

and experienced enough to be willing to put everything, my whole life, on the line for Him. On Friday night April 12th, I made final promises of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience before our SOLT General Priest Servant, Fr. Peter Marsalek, as the Archbishop of Detroit, Allen H. Vigneron, celebrated the Mass of my Final Profession at our SOLT parish, Most Holy Redeemer. I was overwhelmed by the amount of love and support that I received as family, friends, Sacred Heart Major Seminary formators, professors, and seminarians, as well as almost six hundred parishioners were

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I was in awe as I stood behind the altar and served at the table where Our Lord...would be made present right before me.

in attendance. As I laid down prostrate on the pewabic tile, the gravity of what I was doing hit me anew. The Lord had called me to be His own. To be His beloved.

Through my perpetuals I now belonged to Jesus in a particular way, but the calling to serve Him in charity and at the altar happened the next morning on Saturday, April 13th, at Sacred Heart Major Seminary as I was ordained to the diaconate by Auxiliary Bishop Robert J. Fisher. Tears streamed down my face as I heard the chant, "Bless, sanctify, and consecrate these chosen men." Who was I to be chosen? To be able to participate and

assist at His sacred mysteries? But I heard the Lord's call and know that it is His gratuitous merciful call that has made me worthy, nothing else.

The next morning, Palm Sunday, I served for the first time as a deacon at our parish, proclaiming the gospel, preaching my first homily, and assisting at the altar. I was in awe as I stood behind the altar and served at the table where Our Lord, who lived, died, and rose for me, would be made present right before me.

Throughout the weekend, I was completely overwhelmed by the mercies of Our Lord who so generously served me in asking me to serve Him. I know that He is worth the risk! He is worth everything! I'm all in, give me the grace to always be.



Above (Clockwise from the top left): Newly ordained Deacon Dave Brokke processing out of the chapel at Sacred Heart Major Seminary; The moment of ordination: Bishop Fisher lays hands on Dcn. Dave; At the Mass of his perpetual profession, Br. Dave offers flowers to Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity.



Returning the Lost Sheep

Br. Javier Ebertowski, SOLT

Eight out of Ten. That is roughly the amount of Catholics that I encounter on my weekly hospital visits that have either stopped attending Mass entirely or just do not consider their faith an important foundation anymore. Statistics like this may cause one to wonder how I keep my chin up and not fall into utter despair for the state of the Church. The answer to that is quite simple: Every fallen away Catholic is a potential prodigal son or daughter returning to God the Father. Consider one of the many examples I experienced on a weekly basis.

On a particular Thursday afternoon, I found myself speaking to a woman who was Catholic, but attends "Journey" Church with her son. She also mentioned that she prays and enjoys reading Scripture. When she finished talking about her faith journey to me, I looked at her with empathy and gently reminded her of John chapter 6 verse 53 and said to her, very sympathetically, "We need the sacraments." She looked up at me and said "Yea... I need to get back into that."

Above: Br. Javier standing in front of the hospital, ready for another day of ministry to the sick.

As I usually seek the lost sheep of the house of Israel first, I also make my rounds to many non-Catholics as well. On visits such as these, I introduce myself, begin light conversation, and slowly ease myself into the spiritual realm. After I receive their prayer petitions, I would leave them with the Miraculous Medal. After I tell them the story behind the medal and my own testimony, they are usually very thankful to receive the medal. On more than one occasion I was met with tears of gratitude. Sometimes all we can do is plant seeds and God will water them.

I know that God placed me in the hospital for this semester to help invite back those particular lost sheep. While I think it is not useless to ask questions such as, "How did things get so bad in the Church?" I think it is more helpful to ask questions such as, "If not me, then who?" Who is going to bring back Our Lord's lost sheep? Thus, the next time you encounter a fallen-away Catholic, look at him or her directly in the eye and say that God has placed you there to invite him or her back to His fold and His sacraments.



Fun, Friends, Fellowship

Br. Joseph Spears, SOLT

Since transitioning into religious life and attending seminary, people often think that I don't get to have fun, play sports, or keep up with and see friends. It is really quite the opposite for me. One area that has been really enjoyable and life-giving for me is athletics.

This semester and a small portion of last semester I played basketball for the seminarian team here at Sacred Heart. I assumed that we would only have a few practices and a couple games in the Detroit area, but in January we travelled five hours to Mundelein Seminary, a little north of Chicago. I never would have thought that more than 15 seminaries from around the country would all travel to one location so that we might foster brotherhood, grow in virtue, and, of course, have an opportunity to play a game that we all love. While I was at the tournament I ran into three different friends from my alma mater. I hadn't seen or heard from them in a number of years. They were extremely surprised to see me, and I was surprised to see them as well. I soon came to find out that each of them is preparing for ordination to the diaconate and then priesthood. This shocked me and also gave me a great deal of joy. I couldn't believe how quickly the time had gone. Gathering together in this type of atmosphere was joyous and really helped me recall the connectivity that we have in the Body of Christ. Coming together for brotherhood and virtue-building through sports are some of the small ways that Christ invites us into Himself. He uses these avenues to show us His Love, which helps us to draw closer to Him. This is one way He has called me onwards. Needless to say, I'm glad that I'm still having fun, playing sports, keeping up with friends, and all the while growing in Christ.

Br. Joseph at Sacred Heart Major Seminary's annual College vs. Theology basketball game.

Gathering together in this type of atmosphere was joyous and really helped me recall the connectivity that we have in the Body of Christ. ”

The Grace of Suffering

Br. Timothy Burnham, SOLT

During my time serving at St. Joseph's parish in Corpus Christi, TX, I was blessed to help care for one of our priests who had been battling cancer for many years. Between the time of my arrival in August and Fr. Tito's passing on March 4th, I spent quite a lot of time with him, especially in hospitals and on trips to San Antonio for his chemo treatments. Fr. Tito was a man of very few words, but I learned a lot from spending time with him and witnessing his example of how he dealt with his terminal illness.

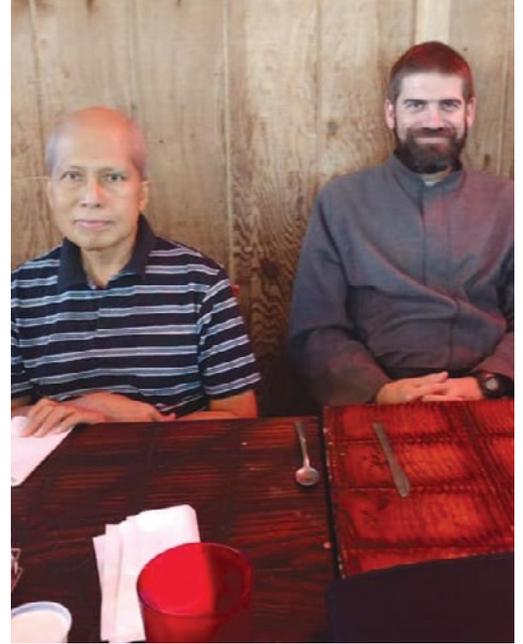
When he wasn't receiving treatments for his cancer, Fr. Tito could almost always be found in our house chapel, praying. Especially on days when he was in a lot of pain, I would find Fr. Tito there, rosary in hand, in front of the tabernacle. He often prayed the rosary and the chaplets of Divine Mercy and St. Michael; other times he just sat in prayerful silence.

From this example of continual prayer in the midst of suffering, Fr. Tito taught me the importance of uniting our sufferings with Jesus. Instead of suffering alone, Fr. Tito would go to the chapel and suffer with Jesus. If we have to suffer, there is no better place to be than in the presence of Jesus, who understands all of our sufferings and enters into our suffering with us.

I also learned a lot from Fr. Tito about the importance of patience in the midst of suffering. All told, Fr. Tito suffered from cancer for nearly ten years. In these final months that I spent with him I witnessed his incredible patience through countless treatments, procedures, tests and trips to the hospital. In the midst of all of this, Fr. Tito seemed always to remain in the present moment. That appeared to be the key to remaining patient. He didn't dwell on everything he had already been through, and he wasn't anxious about what would happen in the future; he remained in the present, and so was able to respond to his sufferings with a great deal of patience.

Finally, Fr. Tito taught me not to use illnesses and sufferings as an excuse. Even as his cancer became very advanced and caused him a lot of physical pain, he remained dedicated to celebrating Mass for the parish. While other priests offered to fill in for him, he insisted upon celebrating Mass until he was absolutely unable. Instead of using his sickness as an excuse to take life easy, Fr. Tito showed his great devotion to the Mass by continuing to celebrate it even while he was in great pain.

I'm very grateful for the time that I had getting to know Fr. Tito and for the excellent example he gave me of priestly and religious life. Rest in peace Fr. Terencio Ayo.



Above (from the top): Br. Timothy and Fr. Tito sharing a meal; Bishop Michael Mulvey of Corpus Christi incenses the casket at Fr. Tito's funeral.



Fr. Tito showed his great devotion to the Mass by continuing to celebrate it even while he was in great pain.



Fighting Evil with Beauty

Br. David Snow, SOLT

Br. David playing the violin in front of an image of Mary cradling baby Jesus.

Did you see the movie *Unplanned*? I exited the theater re-convicted of two facts: abortion is a grave evil in our society, and God's mercy is victorious. As never before, I was confronted with the fact that I live in a nation that sanctions the killing of innocent, defenseless children in the name of "freedom." Evil is all around, but abortion plays a particular role in the breakdown of society and the breakdown of the family. And yet, in the face of this evil act, God's mercy overpowers and shines all the brighter. At the end of *Unplanned* Abby Johnson looks through the fence at the abortion clinic—finally shut down—that she used to run. The fence is covered in flowers, each representing a child lost to the clinic's holocaust. Abby places two blossoms on the fence and whispers, through tears, a repentant prayer to her two children she had aborted. Here I saw a soul brought to conversion; one who perpetrated great evil but through contrition came to know the beauty of God's mercy. It became evident that God can use even our tattered past to bring about His glorious plan and the triumph of His mercy over each one of our sins, and the triumph of new life over death.

Two months before the movie was released, I was privileged to play the violin at the seminary's annual Dinner for Life. Our gymnasium was transformed into an exquisite dining room. Many donors and benefactors flooded in as another seminarian and I serenaded them with classical music. I was ecstatic to be playing beautiful music once again at a high level. I was even more ecstatic when thousands of dollars were raised for the evening's sponsored pro-life charity. The dinner was a success, thanks be to God, and my studies resumed the next day.

Several weeks of hard work flew by, and then *Unplanned* was released. Seeing the movie prompted me to reflect. What can be done to fight this cruelty? What had I done to fight it? As I prayed about writing this little reflection, it was as if the Lord said to me, "You fight with beauty." Abby Johnson was converted through prayer and friendship. In our own small way at the Dinner for Life, the other seminarian and I had fought evil with the beauty of music. How can I help God's mercy overcome the evils of abortion? I must allow him to use me as an instrument of his beauty, an instrument of prayer, friendship, and music. Beauty disarms evil. Then God's mercy can heal the trauma evil leaves behind.

As I prayed about writing this little reflection, it was as if the Lord said to me, "You fight with beauty."

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Br. Joseph Spears looking to score for the Sacred Heart Major Seminary philosophers.



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*On the front cover: Fr. Peter Marsalek, SOLT, solemnly blesses the newest perpetual member of SOLT, **Br. Dave Brokke**, at our SOLT parish Most Holy Redeemer in Detroit.*

*Right: **Br. David Brokke** and classmates lay prostrate immediately before being ordained deacons.*



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