It is a pleasure for me to be here at this important conference centered as it is on the Holy Word of God in the Life of the Church and specifically on the critical task of integrating scriptural studies and theology in the formation of our future priests. I am so very grateful to Father Scott Carl, chairman of this conference and of the Jerome Quinn Institute of Biblical Studies, for coordinating the details of these days of study and reflection.

May this conference be the first of many to explore and enunciate what the Second Vatican Council called “the soul of Theology.”

As you are aware, this same Council stated quite clearly that the first task of the bishop is to proclaim the Gospel with fidelity and zeal, so that all men and women may come to know the saving power of Jesus Christ and His beloved bride the Church. Priests, as collaborators and assistants in the mission and activity of their bishop, share in this critical task. And while this collaborative proclamation is done in a multitude of ways, most preeminently and importantly by the holiness of their lives, priests must constantly strive to be men who are deeply familiar with the written word of God, so that they may preach its message with conviction and competency.

How appropriate today’s first reading is when we consider the vocation of the seminarian who is preparing to become an ordained herald of God’s holy Gospel. “Earthen vessels” – these are the words of a very human Paul, who knows his own proclivities to sin and weakness. And yet he is strengthened by the surpassing grace of Jesus Christ, in whom he finds his strength.

This struggle with our earthen nature is not limited to the moral or spiritual life. It is also a real danger in the intellectual life. Arrogance and pride, fatigue and confusion, the desire to discover the “next big thing” - these are all dangers when one attempts to

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1 *Dei Verbum*, 24
2 *Lumen Gentium*, 25
3 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4
navigate the waters of any intellectual pursuit worthily and well. How much more so do
they pose a danger to the biblical theologian and scripture scholar?

If scripture study is to be truly Catholic, it cannot be simply a study of an ancient
text, as if the bible were a book like any other ancient or historic document.

The Sacred Scriptures, and the Gospels in particular, must be read with the eyes
of reason and of Faith, so that they are received for what they truly are – a privileged
place of encounter with the True and Living God.

Of course, we are not fundamentalists, and we are not afraid of the insights of
good, authentic biblical scholarship, scholarship that so often challenges us to dive even
deeper into the mysteries of our Faith. Your work as scholars is important, not least of all
because your research allows us better access to the infallible revelation of God. For this
reason we honor Monsignor Jerome Quinn, for whom this Institute is named, as not only
a brilliant and dedicated scholar, but also a fierce promoter of that interplay between faith
and reason that makes the encounter with the True and Living God possible.

Jesus speaks forcefully in today’s Gospel of the holy integrity for which every
Christian must strive. We are called to be perfect as the Father is perfect, conquering all
those tendencies within us that prevent realizing that potential. But, as you know, the
Christian moral life is much more than do’s and don’ts. It is meant to be a life lived in
Him, through Him, and with Him, who willingly embraced the cross in a life of total self-
giving.

In the beginning, “God made man in his own image.” This is the image of a God
who, in Himself, is a communion of total self-giving. Thus, the real tragedy of lust, as
referenced in this passage, is that it turns us in on ourselves. It turns the other person into
an object to be conquered and used, rather than as a person to love and to be loved by in
turn. We know from Genesis that this tendency is one of the first consequences of the
fall. In today’s Gospel, Christ invites us, or rather, commands us, to return to the
beginning, and to see in the other, a person to be loved and to receive, rather than as a
tool to be used and discarded.

Of course, the only real way to return to this beginning is in and through
communion with Christ. He, who is the new Adam, makes all things new, allowing us to
conquer even the sinful lust of the flesh.

My dear brothers and sisters, it is my sincere hope that these days of study and
reflection may lead you not only to greater professional competency, but more
importantly into a deeper commitment to be in union with Christ. This Divine Intimacy
can only make you better able to discern the truths of our Faith enunciated in the Holy
Word of God, and better able to express those truths to the men entrusted to your
teaching and your formational work.

As you and I come forward to receive our Lord in the Holy Eucharist today, may
we, like Paul, give thanks to God for the supreme gift of His Son, who allows us, through
His Church, to enter once again into that new beginning which is the promise of our salvation.