

One of the most exhilarating movies in Hollywood history is a film called *Ben-Hur*.

I'm talking about the 1959 version with Charlton Heston. It's set at the time of Christ and it's about a Jewish prince named Judah Ben-Hur.

His culture is collapsing around him, but he refuses to give up his faith, so he's betrayed by his best friend. Then he's condemned to be a slave as an oarsman on a Roman war galley.

This was practically a death sentence. A rower could die of exhaustion or go down with the ship in a lost battle.

There's one powerful scene where the Roman Consul, Quintus Arius, comes down into the wooden hull of the ship to inspect the oarsmen before going into battle. They are all at attention, sitting in rows, chained to their oars...

Arius silently inspects them and then levels with them: "Listen to me all of you! You are all condemned men. We keep you alive to serve this ship. So row well and live."

From the earliest days when Christ established his Church...the Church has been compared to a great ship. Like Noah's Ark. Sailing through the chaotic waters of a sinful world...

Strengthening us in grace and virtue and bringing us to the safe harbor of heaven. Piloted by Christ the King. Propelled by the Holy Spirit.

St. Boniface says, “In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life's different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course.”

Churches were classically designed to look like ships -- that's why the central part of the church is called the NAVE where we get the term Navy.

But to the eyes of the world, it seems like this Navy is sinking...many in society see Catholics as condemned men, exhausted slaves, who will go down with the ship chained to their oars as they row against the inevitable current of a collapsing culture.

This seems to be the fate of the first followers of Jesus. The 12 apostles at the Last Supper...Sent out and kept alive long enough to be chained to the Barque of Peter...and to die a martyr's death...

To the world the apostles were nothing but slaves who died in bondage...But in reality they found a freedom that couldn't be conquered by death...A JOY that no suffering could diminish.

How? Not just because they knew in their bones that Jesus is risen gloriously from the dead, not just because they had the Holy Spirit dwelling in them, but because they obeyed Jesus' commandments at the Last Supper...

“Remain in my love...and LOVE one another...I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”

So, I'm going to give you one practical suggestion for how you can keep these commandments

Tithe your time! Tithing your money is another topic...Tithe your time...the idea is that none of your time is yours. None of your money is yours...it all belongs to God...there's an ancient practice of acknowledging this truth by giving 10% of everything back to God. No questions asked.

10% of your personal time and undivided attention belongs to God unequivocally...base it off the 24 hour day...that means 2.5 dedicated to God.

Maybe we're not ready for that...start smaller...how long are we awake? 15 hours...that's 1.5 hours of daily time dedicated to God at least...**That's not generous, that's just...**(praying, reading, studying, works of charity)

The first thing to do when you get to college is to set aside intimate TIME daily...first to remain in his love in silent prayer, but then, to love one another.

Remember we have to inhale and exhale, if we want to row well...time in prayer is how you inhale...works of charity is how you exhale...we need both...the second thing I challenge you to do...go to your local parish and sign up to teach Catechism once per week to children (middle school especially).

If you don't, someone much less prepared and less qualified will try. A young teen walked into the parish office the other day and didn't know the Sign of the Cross.

Prayer and Charity...

That's how you stir into flame the Holy Spirit within you...It's not enough to know the truth...it's not enough just to have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit through Baptism...St. Paul says we must stir it into flame...Soul is like Chocolate milk...

SILENT prayer is the only way to do that...and it's in prayer that we realize like those first apostles...

...that this ship is never going down...it's only going up...we are the Church militant rowing into battle...if we persevere, if we are purified, we will join the Church triumphant in heaven...

The most secure place you can be is on board...not just as a passenger in the state of grace, but as a rower, propelling that grace! As an instrument of that grace!

By living our vocations...committing our lives...bound to our oars....not forced with chains of slavery, but freely clinging to Christ with the bonds of love.

Our baptismal promises, our wedding vows, our ordination promises tie us intimately to the one master who leads us to freedom.

What does it mean to row well? It means to cling to Christ in prayer...because prayer empowers us to pull through any obstacle with HIS strength...

Seton graduates....right now you are neither condemned nor committed to anything...because of that the world calls you “free”...but one day soon you are going to die.

What do you want to have done with the life God gave you? Today he calls you...Don't let your life be taken from you...lay it down freely...there is no greater love...

Spend your life for him. Spend your strength for him. Spend your mind for him.

He gives you the best of himself...Are you going to give him the best...or are you going to give him what's left?

Will you be the saint he raises up in the midst of persecution and corruption? Will you abide in him?

Some men here tonight are called to the priesthood, others to religious life, still others are meant to be mothers and fathers sanctifying their ordinary work in the middle of the world.

Your class is an eclectic group...with a wide range of talents...not unlike the first apostles...you've been described as underrated, fighters, hard workers...but always united...

We are all called to row...we often don't see the fruits of our efforts...we simply trust...that while we faithfully labor in the hull...the Holy Spirit is at the helm...

Today you are sitting in rows...but you don't have to row...you aren't chained. You aren't condemned...You can walk away.

But you haven't. You came to this school, you came here tonight...To listen to the words of a condemned man...to join yourself to this condemned man!

Not some careless Roman Consul unconcerned if you live or die, but Jesus Christ...who feeds you with his body and washes you with his blood before going into battle...

He sees you, he hears you, he delights in you and now he levels with you:

“Listen to me all of you. I no longer call you slaves. I call you friends. I have come that you might have life. I have given you *this* life to serve *my* ship. So row well, and live.”