

Berube: Some fruits have come out of the first-year seminary desert

This year has been a year of abundant blessing for me – from many directions where I expected growth should come, but also through many surprises.

Perhaps one of my biggest realizations this year is how much I have yet to grow. I can see how it takes nine years for a man to be formed into a pastor of souls and minister in the Person of Christ, and even then how he has to realize he is not really worthy, but has to continue relying on Christ for worthiness.



Marc Berube

As propaedeutic seminarians, our schedule is filled with prayer: the community begins our day with Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and morning prayer at 6:50, and after breakfast, the five of us in our first year are back in the chapel for 45 minutes of meditative prayer using Scripture or other spiritual texts.

We also have daily Mass, Liturgy of the Hours at midday, a daily rosary, and evening prayer as a community, plus any private prayer we may add. Our routine can easily seem overwhelming. So much prayer! How can a 19-year old like myself manage to adapt to the serious formation of our life here and focus on my prayer?

There were – and still are – definitely growing pains; but slowly I am learning to open to God in all weakness, seeing that He still passionately loves me, and then love Him back. This relationship creates a bottomless well from which you

can draw all strength and grace. I don't think I'm going to run out of prayer any time soon!

Many of you may not have seen a seminarian out and about in the community for a long time. Unfortunately due to the present world situation, we have been fairly secluded in our formation this year.

For me, some fruits have come out of the isolation. The propaedeutic year is meant to be a sort of "desert experience": time away from the world in all its busyness to grow as men and disciples of Christ, in imitation of He who spent 40 days in the wilderness in preparation for public ministry (see Mark 1:12-13).

The efforts to provide that desert include a fast from technology and media for the year, weekly days of silence, and teaching on Scripture, catechism, and prayer. Due to the pandemic this year, the desert has also been translated into not often seeing my family and friends, and generally rarely leaving the closed community.

Again, this has proved to be an opportunity to hear something that perhaps God is wishing to teach me: trust. Embracing the challenges of what is being called of me in the present time, namely faithful commitment of the heart and mind, in all the seminary has to offer us, to the best of my abilities.

Nonetheless, seminary formation is not meant to be like this! Our chances of pastoral ministry and growth, and adventures out in the Catholic world are probably our biggest loss this year. We miss you all and look forward to a time when the people of our Catholic community can live in unity once again without hindrance or fear.

– Marc Berube was born in Sherwood Park and grew up on acreages near Edmonton. He will be entering his second year of formation at St. Joseph Seminary and in his first year of philosophy in September. He is studying to be a priest for the Archdiocese of Edmonton. This column was first published in Exiit Qui Seminatur – the newsletter of St. Joseph Seminary.