

**Germain Grisez's Thanksgiving on the Occasion of
His Reception from Mount St. Mary's University of the
Doctorate of Divinity, *honoris causa***

1 May 2009

Now is the time for me to give thanks.

My good parents gave me life and brought me up, and most of my teachers and pastors helped my parents educate me and form me in the faith of the Catholic Church. I am very grateful to my parents and to all who helped them.

During my fifty-two years of teaching, my students taught me a great deal. Their questions and objections sparked most of the insights that resulted in what is original in my works. The smile of delight of good students when they understood points I was making also made me try to explain things more clearly and fully. I am grateful to all my students and thank the few who are here today.

During all those years, fellow employees made it possible for me to do my work and helped me do it. Housekeeping and maintenance people, staff members, and others contributed in ways I seldom noticed and too often took for granted. Librarians and academic colleagues provided their indispensable help. I am grateful to all those co-workers, and thank the few who are here today.

Beginning in 1965, other able writers and scholars agreed to help me with my work, and many still continue doing so. All of them are in some way coauthors with me, for their help has directly affected what appears on the pages of my books and articles. I am very grateful to all those collaborators, and warmly thank the few who are here today.

During the mid-1970s, I became convinced that the Catholic Church needed a new moral theology. Being a philosopher rather than a theologian, I thought someone else would have to meet that need. So, I tried to persuade some able theologians to undertake the project, but none was willing. I was teaching philosophy at a Catholic college in Saskatchewan, where there were no graduate or seminary theology courses and no theological library, and where my main responsibilities were teaching and sharing in the collegial effort to make the college function well. So, in 1977, when I began to think that I might be called to produce a new moral theology, I realized that I could not undertake it unless I had an academic position where I could teach theology beyond the college level, a position with teaching duties shaped by my research and writing, a position with a substantial expense fund and adequate office space, but without administrative or committee responsibilities.

Obviously, no institution was likely to offer me that position. But, I reasoned, if the Lord wants me to do this work, he will give me the means to do it. So, in April 1977, I told the Lord I would undertake the work if he provided the means, and I mailed a description of the project and of my needs to about fifteen bishops for whom I had done some work or who thought well of work I had done for others. Six months later, about thirty bishops, a few wealthy laymen, a foundation, and the Knights of Columbus had contributed to a trust fund to endow the project, and Pittsburgh auxiliary Bishop John McDowell, who had organized that response to my letter, told me to find the place to do the work.

I am grateful to Bishop McDowell and to those who contributed to the trust fund, not only for his work and for their contributions, but also because they confirmed this element of my vocation and thereby assured me that the Holy Spirit would enable me to do what I had known I could not do.

Looking into possibilities, I found that most involved conditions that made them unattractive. But Father Harry Flynn, then Rector of Mount Saint Mary's Seminary, encouraged Robert Wickenheiser, then Mount President, to meet with me to talk over the possibility of my coming here. I expected many questions and a lengthy negotiation. But in little more than one day, a plan without burdensome conditions was agreed to, and President Wickenheiser asked me to draft the contract. I soon completed the draft, and he accepted it with a few small amendments. I remain grateful to Father—now retired Archbishop—Flynn and to Dr. Wickenheiser for cooperating with me in creating the position that was named the *Reverend Harry. J. Flynn* Chair of Christian Ethics.

By our contract, my Chair belongs to the Mount as such—not to the college or seminary or Grotto—and I have been subordinate only to the President. Still, to carry out by duties, I needed the cooperation of seminary rectors and deans, college deans and department chairs, and other administrators. Over the years, almost all of them cooperated well and seldom tried to treat me as a subordinate. I am grateful to all of them and thank the few who are here today.

All the presidents of the Mount—Robert J. Wickenheiser from 1979–1993, Rev. James M. Loughran, S.J., during 1993–1994, George R. Houston, Jr., from 1994–2003, and Thomas H. Powell from 2003 to the present—not only faithfully fulfilled our contract but cooperated well in developing it as conditions changed. I am grateful to all of them and thank Dr. Powell, who, during the past six years, has been very considerate and generous to me, and who judged me worthy of the honor he has now bestowed on me.

On Sunday, the first of May, 1949—sixty years ago this evening—I went to a mixer dance sponsored by the young adults' group of a neighboring parish and met Jeannette Selby. We married on June 9, 1951. Always ready to help me with my work when she could, her understanding of it and involvement in it gradually grew, and from September 8, 1979, when we came to the Mount, she not only met all my needs for administrative

and secretarial assistance but helped me articulate new ideas by listening and asking questions until we both knew what I had been beginning to think. Early in 2005, Jeannette suffered a devastating stroke and died.

By the end of that year, I had met Mariazinha Rozario. We married on February 25, 2006, and Mariazinha now takes good care of me and in other ways encourages and supports my work. I am grateful to both Jeannette and Mariazinha and warmly thank Mariazinha, who is here with me today, for all that she does for me.

God gave me an unusual set of mental capacities, along with some natural limitations and defects that, paradoxically, facilitate the use of those capacities. He also gave me the opportunities to make good use of my capacities. As for what I have done with those capacities and opportunities to use them, I alone am responsible for its shortcomings. Like the capacities themselves and the opportunities to use them, everything good about my use of them has been God's gift: he has accomplished all I have done. I am grateful to God for all his gifts—the capacities, the opportunities to use them, and the good use of them—and warmly thank our Lord Jesus who is here with us today.

Nearly sixty years ago, early in the morning of Christmas day 1949, I committed myself to an intellectual life in service to the truth, not to truth in general or to the speculative truth that satisfies curiosity, but to the *praeambula fidei*—the set of truths that make a sound case for accepting the Catholic faith and holding fast to it—and to the Catholic faith itself, in other words, to part of the truth that puzzled Pontius Pilate when Jesus told him that he had been born and came into the world to testify to it. Having very imperfectly fulfilled that commitment but never deliberately been unfaithful to it, I am especially grateful to God for that element of my vocation, and for giving me a lasting commitment to it and whatever I have done to fulfill that commitment, and I thank Jesus for leading and supporting me all along the way of these nearly sixty years.

Finally, I congratulate my fellow members of this graduating class, especially those who will sooner or later be ordained priests. In choosing to accept ordination, you will make a commitment to pastoral life in service to the whole of the same truth to which I am committed—the truth to which, as he told Pilate, Jesus bore witness with his very being and his entire life.

In Matthew, 7:21–23, Jesus warns that not all who call him “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom but only those who do his heavenly Father's will. He says that many will tell him on judgment day that they prophesied, cast out demons, and did many miracles in his name, yet he will reply: “I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.” This warning is for those who do things *in Jesus' name*—that is, for those who act *in persona Christi*—that is, for those who are ordained. Therefore, I pray that the Holy Spirit will give you a lasting commitment to pastoral life in service to the integral truth of the Gospel and the grace to be faithful to that commitment and do God's will, so that, on judgment day, Jesus will say to you: “I have always known you; stay with me, you good and faithful servants.”