



Pontifical North American College
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Europe

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The 25th Annual Carl J. Peter Lecture Series

ROME, 17, March 2024

On 17, March 2024, Peggy Noonan, was the honored lecturer for the 25th annual Fr. Carl J. Peter Lecture Series at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. Ms. Noonan's lecture was on the subject of, "*What the Church Says in Its Sermons*" Ms. Noonan spoke to a capacity audience in the Corso Auditorium of the College. Those in the audience included invited guests, and dignitaries along with the seminarians and priests of the Pontifical North American College

Ms. Noonan is the popular and celebrated opinion columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, where her Saturday column, "Declarations," has run since 2000. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 2017 and is the author of nine books on American politics, history and culture.

Ms. Noonan was a special assistant and speechwriter for President Ronald Reagan, whose speeches still live in the minds of many Americans today. Before entering the Reagan White House, Ms. Noonan was a producer and writer at CBS News in New York, and an adjunct professor of Journalism at New York University.

Peggy Noonan in addressing the audience gathered for the 25th annual Carl J. Peter Lecture began her lecture on, "*What the Church Says in Its Sermons*" by referring to Pope St. John Paul's 1999 "*Letter to Artists*", "What you imagine you have produced and what you have produced can be very different." Ms. Noonan then went on to speak about one such experience she had as a speech writer for President Ronald Reagan. The particular experience she referred to was the speech she wrote for the space shuttle Challenger disaster January 20, 1986. She said, "I was not satisfied in what I wrote, and I did not think the President was satisfied either, but the next day the phone messages were all congratulatory." Her message to the seminarians was to write their future homilies from a place of faith. She said, "Go back to the meaning of the Church, go back to the basics and speak words of simplicity and clarity." Ms. Noonan exhorted the seminarians as well as priests and deacons in attendance to speak to the faithful about the basic truths of the Church. She said, "We need to get back to the basics, the Sacraments, the Saints, the Real Presence in the Holy Eucharist."

She used the image of a whole cloth and how the Church in its homilies and sermons seems to only be mending the edges of the cloth rather than caring for the entire woven cloth so that it can be made stronger. In her lecture she spoke about how often the Church in her homilies and sermons speaks of the faith only along the edges of the cloth and does not speak often enough from the center of the cloth, where the fullness of the faith and belief can be found.

She encouraged the seminarians, deacons, and priests in the audience to return to the basics of what the Church believes and teaches with simplistic clarity. To illustrate this point Ms. Noonan said, “The faithful need to be taught what they believe, the young to learn it anew and the elderly to be reminded what they believe.” She referred to the Saints of the Church such as St. Theresa of Avila and St. John Vianney, the Cure’ of Ars, as powerful witnesses to the faith and how their lives can encourage the faithful and bring others to faith. She said, “The faithful need to be fortified and to be told the Christian story. They need to be told why they are there in church.” Ms. Noonan in her lecture presented to those in attendance the importance of re-catechizing the Church’s faithful in what we believe and what we teach, the Sacraments - in particular the meaning of the Real Presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist - and the lives of the Saints. She said, “Everybody loves a story.” In closing she encouraged the audience to get back to what we believe in our homilies, and more will stay and more will come.” Her final words to the seminarians, deacons and priests of the audience were, “Go Save Us!”

History of the Carl J. Peter Lecture Series

Fr. Carl J. Peter of the Archdiocese of Omaha and professor at the Catholic University of America was a noted theologian, teacher, and preacher. To honor his memory the Peter family established the Fr. Carl J. Peter Chair of Homiletics at the Pontifical North American College. Thanks to the generous gift from the family of the late Father Carl J. Peter, devoted alumnus, past faculty member, and from the alumni of the College, the seminary provides an intensive program of seminars, workshops, and courses in homiletics, and the occupant of the Carl J. Peter Chair who coordinates the entire program, especially the required preaching *practica* in Second, Third, and Fourth Years. The Chair also offers an annual lecture to promote the art of preaching and to remember Fr. Carl J. Peter.

The Pontifical North American College serves as the American seminary in Rome. Founded in 1859 by Blessed Pius IX, the College has formed over 5000 priests near the heart of the Church for service in dioceses around the United States and Australia. The College strengthens the bonds between Rome and local Churches worldwide, and it allows its students a first-hand encounter of the Church’s rich religious and cultural heritage.

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A gallery of photos from the Mass may be viewed at <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjBhR2P>. Local diocesan news organizations may contact Chukwuma Odigwe codigwe@pnac.org for information regarding photo use credits and permissions. All other news sources may contact pnacdc@pnac.org for photo permissions.

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