Allow me to begin by once again thanking Dr. Leo Nestor and the CUA Chamber chorus for his composition and their preparation and execution of the musical portion of this annual Vesper service. And I also wish to thank Fr. Jude De Angelo and the liturgy side of the staff of campus ministry for providing us with this venue tonight. In point of fact we need to thank both the School of Music as well as Campus Ministry for the use of this chapel because their organ is regularly used for practice by music students, which schedule is simply a logistical nightmare. Thank you both for breaking the logjam and making this possible.

This afternoon’s gospel, John 17:11b-19, is taken from the proper gospel for today’s feast of Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian. The lines about “truth” and being “consecrated in truth” resonate in a particular way in these years of the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, especially today as the Holy Father begins his state visit to the United Kingdom a highlight of which will be the beatification of a theologian (colleague) John Henry Cardinal Newman. The pope’s repeated insistence on truth, I judge, stands and will stand as a hallmark of his papacy. And this search for truth for this pope is open to the wide world as seen in his zeal to emphasize what we Catholics (and Catholic theologians) hold in common about natural law and the values of a civil society, which will undoubtedly be a (major?) part of his speech to members of Parliament, diplomats, academic and business leaders in Westminster Hall – the very place where St. Thomas More was tried for charges of high treason in 1535. Words about “truth” and being “consecrated in truth” should also resonate fully with us in our enterprise in the School of Theology and
Religious Studies as we begin again to engage in the search for truth in this ecclesial context.

At the very end of July I was asked by an “inside the Beltway” pundit and professional blogger whether I would be willing to contribute to a blog posting on the twentieth anniversary of the document *Ex corde ecclesiae* on Catholic higher education (Aug. 15, 1990). I readily agreed and was given two days notice to produce!

I confess that since becoming Dean of STRS in 2005 that document has legitimately preoccupied much more of my time than it had in the previous fifteen years. That document was also on my mind at the time of the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to this campus in April 2008 when he addressed presidents of Catholic universities and colleges and leaders of Catholic education in this country. It was of interest to me that on that occasion he did not mention *Ex corde* but rather spoke as theologian to theologian, Catholic scholar to Catholic scholar, about the role of the Catholic university and the vocation of the Catholic theologian.

Since I have been privileged to serve for a quarter of a century at The Catholic University of America located "inside the Beltway" here in Washington, D.C. it should come as no surprise that the processes of government, the way debates take place in the Congress and the wording of lobbyists' appeals eventually would influence how I appreciate national debates and matters of international import, including university and church life.

After twenty-five years on the periphery of America's public life, more often than not I ask myself "who is framing this debate?" Among the most important things which *Ex corde ecclesiae* has taught us is that Catholic theology is framed in, by, and for the
church Catholic -- meaning its universal and international nature and its breadth and history of over two thousand years.

For me three issues stand out that exemplify how this document has helped to "frame the debate."

Theology in Communio. At about the same time that Catholic theology in America was engaged in the "turn to the subject" Ex corde ecclesiae reminded us that Catholic theology is an ecclesial enterprise. It is not about oneself, one's ideas, or one's approach to God and the things of God. In the end Catholic theology has to be about the ecclesial "we" and how the church is drawn as a church, into the living God. It is about communion, understanding that this term itself carries with it a number of nuances and shades of meaning including being enveloped in the mystery of the triune God and a member of the pilgrim church on earth.

Theology in the Academy and the Church. Again, at about the same time when it was conventional to divorce the "academy" from the "church" and its theology, Ex corde ecclesiae invited us to reexamine this distinction, not to say dichotomy. Faculties undertook fruitful -- and yes sometimes painful -- dialogue about how Catholic theology could be academically and scientifically rigorous and also simultaneously be for the good of the church's theology and official teaching where the latter means an ongoing evolution of official church teaching and the legitimately probing questions and opinions of theologians.

Many "Catholic moments." Ex corde ecclesiae reminded us that the very concept of multicultural Catholicism is simply to assert what Catholicism has always been and that the idea that there has been or can be "one" or "the" Catholic moment is impossible.
There have been numberless Catholic moments in Catholic theology and university life with many more to come. To be faithful to the breadth of the Catholic intellectual tradition implies humility, a willingness to learn and relearn the many faces, images and likenesses of Catholic theology as incarnated and lived universally always in an historical perspective.

These examples help us pass over the usual labels (liberal-conservative) and self definitions (progressive - traditional) to appreciate what Catholic theology really is and the role which theologians have always had in the church's task of articulating what it believes and teaches, all done not in isolation from or ignorant of but "from the heart of the church."

The saints we honor today, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian, were bishops in the third century, the first fought against schismatics of the Novatian stripe, the latter suffered under the persecution of the emperor Valerian. Today’s feast raises the twin issue of heresy and schism. My own sense is that few of us are really smart enough to be true heretics. But as the esteemed former professor of American Catholic Church History here at CUA, Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, was fond of saying “there are no new heresies; they just come back in new forms.” In light of the example of these outstanding saints I judge that one of our tasks is to name what are authentic doctrines and proper beliefs and what are not. As for schism, I also suspect that actual schisms are few and far between, but that there can be a functional schism depending on how we style and do theology in the church today. If we continue to separate “church” from “academy” and the “self” from the “communal” I suspect we are on very thin theological ice and we are not serving the church well at all. The worst kind of schism, it seems to me, is to put on a façade of working in and for Catholic theology when in fact we undermine it by a lack of conviction or a lack of nerve.
If it is about the “truth” then we need to be courageous, energetic, and fully committed to its search and its rediscovery in our day and age. It also means that whatever are the joys and sorrows, the hopes and fears, the challenges and controversies of the day deserve a reverent hearing and considered forum among us. Mediocrity or half-hearted efforts should have no place in this enterprise or in this School. The comedic line from the Broadway lyric “mediocrity is not a mortal sin” may be humorous in the theater, but mediocrity is more than death in the intellectual academy we call Catholic theology. Rigorous, painstaking research accompanied by intellectual and personal conversion is what we are about. If it is not then what the Letter to the Hebrews (4:12) describes as the two edged sword of the Word of God becomes a butter knife, useful only to spread what is materially soft and malleable, and intellectually inoffensive or bland. Real swords cut and slice where and when necessary. The first excision should always be mediocrity.

This particular year promises to be a very interesting one as we welcome the leadership of President John Garvey who succeeds Bishop David O’Connell as the fifteenth President of CUA. We said our farewells to the then recently named Bishop O’Connell last June and this summer the CUA Magazine dedicated its lead article to him.

The cover says “Catholic Identity: Mission Accomplished.” I suspect that I am not the only one who remembers when an important person in Washington claimed that as a mantra long before the mission was in fact accomplished. I assure you that the then Father O’Connell would be the first to admit that the mission has not yet been accomplished. Welcome to all of you who will help us take it to the next stage as we together ask the question what does it mean to do theology “from the heart of the church.”