



SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES SEMINARY

*New Heart, New Spirit.*

This month marks the thirtieth anniversary of the election of Pope John Paul II. As I reflect on the impact of his pontificate on the Church and the world, some particular thoughts relative to his priesthood come to mind as helpful for seminary formation today.

Pope John Paul used his sacred office to evangelize the world, to hold up the incarnate, crucified and risen Christ as the center of human history and the answer to all of our questions. Everything that the pope said and did proclaimed Jesus Christ to the world. This Gospel passion for evangelization needs to be the center and focus of every priest and every person in the Church today. Despite 2000 years of Christianity, Christ is still not known and loved by so many.

John Paul had a very tender, personal and theological devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, seeing in her the fullness of Christian discipleship and the feminine identity of the Church. As the mother of priests and seminarians, Mary is a powerful witness and advocate for all who serve the Church in the sacrament of Holy Orders. Authentic Marian devotion always deepens Christian faith.

The pope had a breath-taking perspective on the moral nature of the economic, political and cultural questions of the modern age. With great wisdom, knowledge and feeling, he applied the Church's social teaching to the lived actualities of the world. Priests must know, love and understand the modern world as it is, in order to teach and apply the Gospel in ways that are transformative to the current situation. The Gospel is never proclaimed and lived in some sort of non-historical vacuum, hermetically sealed off from reality. John Paul's first trip to Poland in 1979 is a prime example of how the proclamation of the Gospel truth sets off waves of spiritual energy that translate into political-socio-economic change.

Pope John Paul articulated and lived a profound vision of the ministerial priesthood as a participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ as mediator and servant. The pope's own deep priestly identity gave him a powerful entrance into the minds and hearts of the young whenever he spoke about the mystery of vocation. How many vocations to the priesthood, religious life, the diaconate, marriage, lay ministry, mission work, catechesis were somehow fostered and strengthened through the words and example of Pope John Paul II? Whenever a priest lives his own vocation with integrity and passion, his example gives impetus and inspiration for a diversity of other people to embrace their vocation. Without ever being clerical, Pope John Paul was always priestly.

As we mark his thirtieth anniversary of papal election this month, John Paul's shining example of priestly identity and service continues to form, enlighten and guide our seminarians. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on priestly formation, "Pastores Dabo Vobis", John Paul reminds us that the humanity of the priest is a bridge to Christ. What is said of the priest can truly be said of all the baptized. Each of us may be the only Christ that another person ever experiences. How vital it is that we live our faith well. God's blessings on your struggle to live the ideals of Christ in all their vigor.