

Seminary students say they desire to emulate pope's example

WASHINGTON - When Deacon Michael Spurr is ordained to the priesthood June 7, he hopes he can take the example of holiness of Pope Benedict XVI wherever his path of ministry takes him.

A student at Theological College of The Catholic University of America, Deacon Spurr was one of a group of seminary students who welcomed the pope to the Edward J. Pryzbyla University Center on campus April 17. They greeted him as he was on his way to speak to Catholic educators.

"He spoke a lot about our obligations, about preaching and teaching the faith and to really go ahead and place our hope in Christ," said Deacon Spurr, who is from the Diocese of Raleigh, N.C.

The young deacon expects that Pope Benedict's repeated call to hope in the goodness of God, even as the church continues to feel the impact of the clergy sexual abuse scandal, will serve as an encouragement "to go out and live our vocations."

"It reminds us about our obligations to be good and holy priests and to do whatever we can to make sure this never happens again. That's where we really have to push forward in our vocations and be holy men, good men of prayer and to be good shepherds of the flocks entrusted to us," he said in an interview with Catholic News Service April 19.

Other Theological College students felt much the same, coming away from their brief encounter with the pope feeling that they can best live out their ministry by following the example of Pope Benedict in proclaiming a hope-filled Gospel message.

John Paul Shimek, a second-year theology student from Milwaukee, was the first seminarian the pontiff approached upon entering the center. "My knees began to shake and my heart began to heart began to beat quickly," he said. "The words that came to mind is 'Jesus is coming to me.'"

Thinking about the experience afterward, Shimek said he saw in the pope a person who is deeply in love with Christ.

“It meant to me that if I’m going to be a good priest I also have to be deeply in love in with Christ. That image of him coming to me meant that I will have to go to people too,” he told CNS.

Seminarian Sean Prince found meeting the pope to be surreal and moving at the same time. He was able to touch Pope Benedict twice – first while he was entering and then as he was leaving his address to educators.

“It definitely impacts your faith, deepens your faith to be in his presence,” said Prince, who is in his first year of studies at Theological College. “He’s an extremely holy man and an excellent model for all priests and seminarians and all the faithful.”