



By Fr. Dennis Gallagher, A.A.

I recall a conversation at a local pub with a faculty friend within the first year of Benedict XVI's pontificate. Taking the measure of Benedict and John Paul II, he observed that John Paul was a seminary professor in his former life, Benedict a university professor. The significance of the comment arose from a sense, early on, that Benedict's writings and speeches were different from his predecessors, less encumbered by official Church language, somehow freer in their purpose of reaching a wider audience of those disposed to reasonable discourse. And so it was: throughout his eight years as Pope, he was the teacher par excellence, always ready to give an account of the hope that was in him (1 Peter 3:15), in words that people could understand, for the revitalization of the Church's witness.

In this respect, Benedict was a great friend of the Catholic college and university, and – I dare say – in his Christ-centered, Augustinian theology, a particular friend of Assumption College. Friendship with Jesus Christ was for him the very definition of being a Christian, and to a flattened out world he evoked the desire for God which lies within each human heart. Like Fr. d'Alzon, the founder of the Assumptionists, he was a man of essentials: the theological virtues, the primacy of love, the Eucharistic liturgy at the center of the Church's life. Benedict also helped those within the Catholic university to remember the distinctiveness of the theological enterprise, never simply an academic discipline among other academic disciplines, but the adventure of faith reaching out toward ever deeper understanding and, in the process, illuminating the contours of a truly human life.

I find myself returning to two other of Benedict's insights. He insisted often upon a particular attitude toward the truth: that we stand not as its proud possessors, but as its humble servants. Such a disposition helps to overcome isolation and opens up the possibility of communion and

friendship with all who genuinely seek the truth and are receptive to its coming toward us. This constitutes the sometimes elusive, but always compelling rationale for the life of the university, and all the more a Catholic college or university.

Benedict also made it clear that true reformers of the Church were the saints. It is not so much by changing Church structures, but by raising up holy men and women that the Church is continually renewed. It must be for this reason that the Holy Father devoted so much time in his Wednesday audiences to elucidating the lives of those who had so completely identified themselves with the person and mission of Jesus Christ. This beautiful testimony to the great teachers of the ancient Church, to monks and missionaries, to mystics and mendicants and scholastics, as well as his own extraordinarily rich collection of homilies, raises Pope Benedict himself to the stature of a Church father, whom we were privileged to call our teacher.

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