

In September 2015, Pope Francis made a historic visit to the United States. It was a thrilling time to be a seminarian in our nation's capital. My seminary – Theological College at the Catholic University of America – is directly across the street from the National Shrine where the Holy Father would celebrate Mass for tens of thousands. The location made our building an ideal place for news crews to gather and film their morning shows or file their stories. Media personnel were buzzing around, setting up shots and equipment, checking light and audio, busily preparing for the arrival of Pope Francis. The atmosphere in the seminary was electric.

But I was sad.

I was kneeling in our fifth-floor chapel, trying to pray, but I was more interested in the chatter of the journalists on the roof of the seminary overlooking the Shrine. I could hear them from where I was in the chapel and their conversation took me back to my life working in the media before I entered the seminary: being on location, flashing credentials, the nerves and exhilaration just before the Big Event. I understood their language, thought through their preparations with them, knew their anticipation.

I felt a sense of loss. *Would my life ever be that exciting again? Lord, I am happy to serve you as a priest if that's your will for me – so why do I feel jealous of those media folks?*

I decided to step out of the chapel. As much as I wanted to stay there and face my emotions and memories, the sense of longing for the past was too much. I was in my third year in seminary, far removed from the bright lights and high energy of the media world. I was happy discerning the priesthood. As I genuflected, I repeated my *yes* to the Lord even with a bit of heaviness over what might have been.

I made my way to the first floor. More action, more excitement. I saw our seminary Facilities Manager, Tim Murphy. He is a busy man to begin with and the arrival of the Pope seemed to impact him in a particularly difficult way because the guests in the seminary brought all their logistical needs to him. He looked like he could use a hand.

“Hey Tim – anything I can do for you?”

“Yeah, actually, thanks. There are some guests who need to be escorted to the fifth floor for on-camera interviews. Could you take them up there?”

I agreed and as Tim led me to meet the guests, my heart started brimming with excitement and possibilities. *Fifth floor? On-camera? That means they're with the media. On the elevator ride, I'll mention to them that I used to work for ESPN. I used to be one of them.* I felt more than a little satisfaction at this turn of events.

Tim opened the doors and my eyes landed on the guests for whom I was now responsible. A young mother and her daughter, the latter confined to a wheelchair and suffering from severe mental retardation.

I was puzzled for an instant but then an explosion of joy lit up my spirit. I felt the voice of the Lord, wordless and unmistakable.

*These are the ones closest to my heart. To be my priest, they must also be the closest to yours.*

As I introduced myself to them, I felt the sense of loss dissolving and being replaced with a firm new sense of purpose. A moment of shifting priorities. The end of

one way of thinking and the beginning of another. The Lord's presence in that elevator. I could not stop smiling at them because in those beautiful souls I glimpsed my future.

My priorities would no longer include yearning for distinction and accolades, no longer involve trying to be associated with – or become one of – the famous and powerful. Rather, the opposite. This radical shift is, in my opinion, what it means for me to be a seminarian in preparation for the priesthood. My new agenda as, God-willing, a priest of Jesus Christ, must become seeking out the lost, the lonely, the miserable, the neglected, the little ones, the overlooked and sharing with them the intimacy and joy of the Lord Jesus, his peace which transcends all understanding.