

A Weekend with the Vicar of Christ

By Sister Christiana, O.P.

Chants of “We love you! We love you! We love you!” were mixed with cries of “Papa, Papa, Papa!” that filled the make-shift concert amphitheater where I stood with 25,000 young adults and seminarians at St. Joseph’s Seminary in Yonkers, New York. The true melting pot of American cultures had seemed to gather for a moment in this single location for one reason only: to encounter Jesus Christ. Young adults, no more than high-school students some of them, had been in the stadium all day, in the heat, for a chance to see their Papa. The fields were shining with the radiance of various Religious groups. Nuns who had never been away from their convent were there too for a chance to hear Christ’s words in person. We watched on the screen as Pope Benedict XVI pulled into the seminary grounds. He entered into a chapel where he greeted hundreds of disabled children and their families. Through the tears of watching Christ’s words, “Let the children come to me” made manifest in our leader, excitement mounted knowing we were next. He was but a few minutes away.

I don’t know how long it took for us to stop screaming and telling him of our love for him. Each time the crowd began to quiet down, another group, fiercely in love, would begin again, “We love you! We love you!” After receiving gifts from various children, recognizing the diversity of Saints and Blesseds from the state of New York, and hearing a somewhat comical rendition of “Happy Birthday” in German by his American fans, Benedict XVI turned his attention to us. His words were clear and focused. His eyes were full of love as he spoke to us of the dignity God has bestowed on us. He reminded us that with this dignity comes great responsibility. As he spoke, my thoughts wandered back to my young students at school that day. I was renewed again with vigor for helping to form leaders of tomorrow who will be well-educated, morally upright, and know the love of Christ so they may pass it onto others.

He ended his speech by imploring us to be true Catholics that we might be a light for the nations, saying, “It is from within the Church that you too will find the courage and support to walk the way of the Lord. Nourished by personal prayer, prompted in silence, shaped by the Church’s liturgy you will discover the particular vocation God has for you. Embrace it with joy. You are Christ’s disciples today. Shine his light upon this great city and beyond. Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free.”