

This story was originally printed in the May 2011 issue of New Earth, the newspaper for the Diocese of Fargo.

Pope John Paul II beatification reaffirms Jesus' pledge: 'Totus Tuus, I'm all yours'

Father Michael Hickin

The gift of a saint is hard to fathom. We touch it in telling moments, tips of an iceberg.

Before Mass begins, yellow-vested youth shuttle back and forth from a First Aid station with water bottles and holy cards. This image from his days of affliction is none too flattering yet evidence of fire-trying gold.

From the balcony hangs a veiled portrait of the Blessed. What pose have they chosen? Whichever one it is, I'm praying for a window into Heaven through his eyes, his look, his body language. Can I hope it's not the same as the one in my hand?

Solemnly proclaimed "Blessed," there's a triple Amen and trumpet blasts. Behind me passes a Sister with the silver reliquary holding a vial of Blessed JP II's blood.

As she approaches Pope Benedict, the image of the new Blessed is unveiled: impressive, beautiful, mature, strong. The air is emotionally and spiritually charged. So many have sacrificed so much to be here. Hundreds and hundreds of big red and white Polish flags are waving madly. Other flags from multiple nations, including America, slice through the sanctified atmosphere. Rounds of applause go round and round and round.

Oddly, the mob scene fades from view, from consciousness even, as I behold him. "I have a message for you," his expression says. Reminiscing about World Youth Day, a former parishioner described seeing him in Toronto, "He was able to look into the eyes of each one of us and smile." So it seems even now for this incalculable mass of humanity.

Later, during the Gospel, I'm struck by the verse: "He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" With those words I squint at him and receive the Holy Spirit. It's as if through this man's face Jesus is blowing the Holy Spirit out upon the whole crowd of fifteen-hundred-thousand people and via the airwaves to millions upon millions. Another Pentecost is upon us!

Others feel it, too, a definite surge of something issuing from this image. Like me, some spoke of the crowd becoming a blur, entering into a one-on-one with the man. Some sense everyone is facing heaven, our common goal. Blessed John Paul II has made it, a hero we can look up to. A strong desire for holiness is kindled. A fire is forging us afresh into God's cherished family.

Fast-forward. The Lamb of God is over with scores of priests still at their places. The gap is closing on my service as minister of Holy Communion. I came for this. A good guess would say about 200,000 Hosts were consecrated; impossible for everyone to receive. I didn't know who they were, but a little flock awaited me; 500 or 600 could receive through me..., if I could get to them.

In a move, mocking Roman traffic, I whisper to my neighbor, "Ciao." Stepping behind my chair, I slide out of our row and cut in line, entering the flow of priests into the piazza. Ahh, what great joy to feed hungry people.

When the ushers say "Return," we have to go, such were our instructions. The ciborium is still half-full. Ugh! Other priests leave, but an official asks me to stay. I bounce from pocket to pocket of people pressing the barricades, hands flailing, signaling for Jesus. Earlier, I asked Jesus for the privilege of emptying the ciborium. About 50 Hosts remain.

Mass is over and the surging crowd becomes a tide against my guard and guide. I keep the ciborium pinned between his shoulder blades. He and another woman-usher push ahead crying out, "Sacerdote! Sacerdote!"

A group comes racing forward, weaseling through the crowd. The gentleman motions and I respond. Empty at last! Later, I learn my priest neighbors only distributed two Hosts. I felt bad for them, yet confirmed in having followed the Spirit's lead.

Being among the last to return to the Blessed Sacrament chapel, I get routed out by another way. This results in finding myself before the coffin of the Blessed just minutes after Benedict had paid his respects.

In a weathered wooden box lay the mortal remains. What does it mean? Why are people falling on their knees, gripping the balustrade, eyes closed, many in tears? This is it. This is the pilgrim's goal. Get as close as possible. Capture the moment: some with cameras, most with prayers.

My heart cries out, "Thank you! You're Home! Now — pull!" The Lord gives me a share of tears. What kind? Of hope?

On my way out of the basilica, I turn once again to look at the coffin. I kneel, holding one hand out and open in silent supplication for the folks I carry and those petitions that are beyond words. A nearby woman, unable to tear herself away from his presence, wears a T-shirt that reads, "JP2 We ♥ You." That sums it up. **We love him.** In him we felt loved. In him we knew the Church-Christ-God loved us. It continues now. There's a sacred certitude.

Distinct and indubitable impression: this people thinks of him as theirs. What he pledged to Mary intertwines itself in a sentiment uttered to all, "*Totus tuus*" — I'm all yours."

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