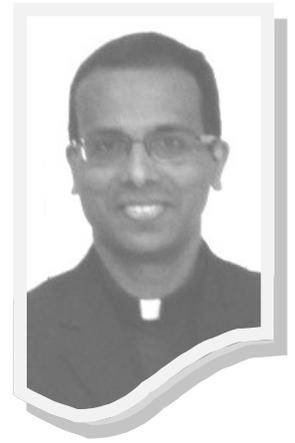




# From the Pastor

## School Pastors' Conference: Norte Dame



**L**ast week I was in attendance at a School Pastors' Conference at Norte Dame in Indiana. We were 92 pastors from all over the country. We listened to and discussed a great deal about the importance of Catholic Education and ways to promote it. I hope to write about it in the coming weeks.

It was my first time at the Norte Dame Campus, and it is quite an amazing place. We stayed in one of the dorms, with the "welcome dinner" held on the first day in the main building, right beneath the golden dome. One of the students who gave us the campus tour told us that none of the students dare to ascend the front steps to the main building because of the belief that if they do, they would not graduate. So, that is the first thing they do after graduation—they ascend the front steps of the main building and take pictures. Our student tour guide let us go up the front steps while he went up using the steps in the back of the building.

I was disappointed that we could not get a tour of the famous football stadium. We went around it and saw the image of the "Touchdown Jesus" right across the stadium. It is the image of the risen Christ with both hands raised up. The tour guide also told us that the students of Norte Dame campus would not dare to walk on the grass in front of Touchdown Jesus, again for fear of not graduating. The image of the Touchdown Jesus is on the front facade of the 13-story library, which has about 3.3 million books.

We ended the campus tour with a visit to the Grotto of Our Lady. This is a replica of the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes and is one-seventh the size of the famed French shrine where the Virgin Mary appeared to St. Bernadette on 18 occasions in 1858. Visiting the site on one of his many trips to his native country, Norte Dame founder Father Edward Sorin

vowed to reproduce it on the campus of his new university. A gift from Rev. Thomas Carroll, a former theology student, made it possible in 1896. Boulders from surrounding farms, most weighing two tons or more, were used in its construction.

A small piece of stone from the original grotto in France is located on the right-hand side of the shrine, directly below the statue of Mary. To Notre Dame students and alumni, the Grotto is a special place to spend a few quiet moments and, especially during football weekends and finals, you might have difficulty finding a candle to light. Hundreds of students have proposed marriage here; outdoor Masses are celebrated regularly; and the Rosary is prayed every day at 6:45 p.m., every day of the year—rain or shine.

Right next to the main building is the beautiful Basilica of the Sacred Heart built in 1871. The entire church is very ornate with beautiful, stained-glass windows and an elegant pipe organ. We had a guided tour of the Basilica, a Gothic-inspired, cross-shaped place of worship and welcome, nurturing Notre Dame's Catholic identity. Many members of the campus community gather here amid its artistic splendor for daily and weekly Masses that are celebrated both in the main body of the church and in its basement Crypt chapel. Confession—or the Sacrament of Reconciliation—is offered frequently, as are other sacraments, such as Matrimony, bringing back numerous alumni who wish to be married in this grand setting with the beautiful artwork that fills this space. Also helping to lift the heart to God are the voices of student choirs that sing at various Masses.

I left Norte Dame with great feelings of what the Catholic education has done—and is doing—for the society and the Church.

—Fr. Jose Thomas