



The Shrine of Our Lady of Pompeii

December 11, 2017

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A Special Thank You...

Dear Friends of the Shrine,

December 3rd was a special day for the Shrine. Not only were we able to celebrate the day after an amazing *Mary and Christmas* concert (more on that in a second), but I was able to say mass with Father John Belmonte. We took this special day to thank him for all he does for our Shrine community.

You see, December 3rd is the day of the Feast of Saint Francis Xavier. This special Saint was a missionary who co-founded, with Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the religious order called the Society of Jesus - otherwise known as Jesuits. To this day, Father Belmonte works tirelessly to deepen his Jesuit connections.

Saint Ignatius is remembered as a talented spiritual director. If he were alive today, and would look in the mirror, Saint Ignatius would see Father Belmonte in the reflection.

I first got to meet John when he would come to the Shrine on Sundays and sit in the pews. One Sunday, John said hello to me and introduced himself as a recently ordained Jesuit priest who was working at St. Ignatius High School. I asked if he had a place to say mass on Sundays and he didn't.

I noticed immediately John was quite talented. He spoke Italian fluently because he lived in Rome for some of his seminary training. That is why John is involved in many of the Italian masses at the Shrine.

John does so much for us at the Shrine, words cannot describe how grateful we are to him for his dedication. On Sundays he drives from Joliet (where he is the Superintendent of Schools for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet) dedicating his time to our Shrine family.

For all the things Father Belmonte does for us, the Feast of Saint Francis Xavier on December 3rd was the perfect day to show Father John just a small amount of our gratitude. At the end of mass we honored him by presenting a wonderful gift - a relic of Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier together with a document from the Pope's sacristy to thank Father John for all that he does for us at the Shrine. John shared the relic with everyone after mass.

But as I mentioned above, December 3rd was also a day to bask in the memory of the music of the holiday season. On December 2nd, we had more than 400 people attend the 17th annual *Mary and Christmas* concert. It truly may have been our finest event. To everyone in our Shrine community that dedicated their time and devotion to make the concert a huge success, I thank you!

As you can see, December 3rd was a special day for us to give thanks at the Shrine. May you all enjoy this blessed Season of Advent.

Blessings to you,

Father Richard
Rector