



Pope Francis talks with Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston as they arrive for a meeting in the synod hall at the Vatican Feb. 13, 2015. O'Malley delivered a lecture, part of the Bergoglio Lecture Series, Feb. 26 at Sacred Heart University. (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Michael Sean Winters

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Cardinal Sean O'Malley delivered a lecture, part of the [Bergoglio Lecture Series](#), at Sacred Heart University on Feb. 26 to an overflow crowd of students and faculty. Given his close collaboration with Pope Francis in the 12 years of this papacy — including 11 as one of the nine cardinals who the pope convened frequently as a council of advisers, the C9 — O'Malley's lecture offered unique insights into the spiritual sources on which the pope has drawn, specifically the ways he embodies both the Franciscan and Ignatian traditions.

"We have a pope who defies all categories and seems to have melded the Jesuit and the Franciscan into one," O'Malley said. "But I believe that Pope Francis is the quintessential Ignatian Jesuit, and that is the hermeneutical key to understanding him."

O'Malley recalled that during his convalescence from wounds suffered in battle, Ignatius spent a good deal of time reading. "Because there were no books of chivalry like Quixote and Ignatius loved to read, they gave the patient Ludwig of Saxons' *Life of Christ* and a florilegium of the lives of the saints. After devouring the books, Ignatius' comment was: 'I want to be a saint like St. Francis.'" So, when the cardinals elected Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio in 2013, it was not entirely surprising that he should take the name of Francis. "I believe that was a very deliberate act and a clear sign of the ideals that would inspire his pontificate," O'Malley said.

This Franciscan influence was evident in a variety of ways. Two of Pope Francis' encyclicals began with words from St. Francis: *Laudato Si'* and *Fratelli Tutti*.

"Pope Francis, like St. Francis, is a poet and a dreamer. Someone who is capable of speaking in gestures," O'Malley observed. He recalled one of Pope Francis' early visits outside Rome to Assisi, a trip on which O'Malley and the other C9 cardinals accompanied him. The pilgrimage began not at a church, but at the seraphic hospital. "I remember thinking what a beautiful way to begin this pilgrimage in the footsteps of St. Francis, by first of all embracing suffering humanity. The Holy Father

gave a moving reflection in his homily and then went around and embraced the children, their caregivers and their parents."

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In one of the most important sections of the talk, O'Malley recalled the story of Bergoglio's spiritual awakening on the feast of St. Matthew and the fact that his favorite painting is Caravaggio's "The Calling of Matthew" in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome. The painting depicts Jesus pointing to the tax collector and the pope has said, "when he looks at that painting he feels that Jesus is pointing at him."

"The Holy Father views morality in the context of an encounter with Christ that is 'triggered by mercy'; 'the privileged locus of the encounter is the caress of the mercy of Jesus Christ on our sins, and thus a new morality — a correspondence to mercy is born,' " the cardinal said. "He views this morality as a 'revolution'; it is 'not a titanic effort of the will,' but simply a response to a surprising, unforeseeable and 'unjust mercy.' Morality is not a 'never falling down,' but 'an always getting up again.' "

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O'Malley, whose doctorate is in Spanish and Portuguese literature, filled his talk with literary references and, being a movie buff, pop culture figured in his talk as well. His references included the important Aparecida document from the Latin American bishops in 2007, Christian Smith's and Melissa Denton's 2005 study of the spiritual and religious lives of American teenagers, and many other sources, all brought together to explain this most fascinating pontificate.

The cardinal's passion for preaching the good news with humor and accessibility shone through. The cardinal's talk surely provoked some conversations among the students, but I also wonder if it inspired some vocations. I would not be surprised.

The lecture had been planned months ago, but it took on a special significance as the entire world prays for the Holy Father's recovery. O'Malley started his lecture by leading the room in the Hail Mary for the pope's health. And, what a great opportunity for the students as they think about this pope, for some, the only one they remember, to have heard from a man who knows him well and who has worked more closely with him than any other American.