

Papal Visit to Quigley Seminary South October 5, 1979

We Are Indeed Something Special

**from *That We May Have Priests, Quigley Seminary South,*
Silver Jubilee Commemorative Book: 1961-1962 - 1986-1987**

During the summer of '78, Father Kicanas had been teaching a day course at Loyola University. When he returned to Quigley South one afternoon, Father Keleher informed him that he had just been appointed by Cardinal Cody to be rector at Mundelein and that the Cardinal would be phoning soon to ask Father Kicanas to take the job of rector at Quigley South. Sure enough, about fifteen minutes later Cardinal Cody phoned and made his request. Not one to be overly tactful when making a request of this sort, the Cardinal told Father Kicanas that when asked to take a job it was always good to do so regardless of how unprepared or unsure one might be about it. Father Kicanas accepted.

The Kicanas years at Quigley South (1978-1984) flowed coherently out of the Keleher years which refocused attention on priesthood as the principal mission of the school. There was a continuity from Father Keleher through Father Kicanas in vocation formation and academic programs largely because Father Kicanas was involved at an administrative level during the Keleher years while the refocusing was taking place.

The successful reemergence of the seminary as a place for young men to explore their interest in priesthood was acknowledged in a most unusual way in the fall of 1979 when Pope John Paul II visited Quigley South. "The visit of Pope John Paul," says Father Jim Noone, "was a real shot in the arm to the school and to its sense of purpose and identity. There was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm generated by that visit. On the part of students there was a real sense of their own dignity and that they were indeed something special."

The events surrounding the papal visit to Quigley South were both exciting and humorous. During the summer of '79 when Father Kicanas returned from a trip to Europe a man from the Secret Service and representatives from the Washington office of the National Council of Catholic Bishops discussed the possibility that the Holy Father would be visiting Chicago and might want to stop by Quigley South. At first no one thought seriously that Quigley South could ever be on the Pope's itinerary until a few weeks later when word came from the Chancery Office that the Holy Father would definitely be at Quigley South on October 5th to address a convocation of Catholic bishops.

From that day on a stream of people came by getting familiar with the facility and making plans for the historic visit. Personnel from the Secret Service and Quigley South staff began making arrangements immediately. The primary concern of Father Kicanas was that Pope John Paul be asked to meet with the faculties and students of the four seminaries. At first the idea met with some resistance because the Holy Father would be on a tight schedule. Nevertheless, Father Kicanas persisted, and following personal intervention from Cardinal Cody on behalf of the seminaries, plans included a brief visit by the Pope to an assembly of students on the campus of Quigley South.

For several weeks prior to the visit, Secret Service personnel spent hours in the school building to insure maximum security. One day, shortly before the visit took place, Father Kicanas noticed that in the large courtyard two of the resident Mallard ducks were dead and their bodies badly mutilated. The Secret Service officers assigned to Quigley South were quite concerned because the killing seemed to be ritual style. The bodies of the dead ducks were promptly placed into specimen bags and brought downtown for analysis.

The following day, a third duck was found slain in the same manner. After a hurried investigation it was determined that a hairy animal, probably a raccoon or opossum did the deed having climbed into the courtyard by a series of shrubs and trees.

About 3:00 a.m. on the morning of October 5th, the Secret Service officers made one final sweep of the building with their dogs. They had the blueprints and went through the entire building checking for hidden people and hidden bombs. Outside scores of people had camped the night on campus grounds, and by 4:00 a.m. police cars and patrols lined the curbs along 79th Street and Western Avenue.

Father Kicanas and several students greeted the Holy Father about 10:00 a.m. on the north porch of the chapel. He then spent several minutes in Father Kicanas' room drinking coffee and chatting about Quigley South and skiing for which the Pope and the Rector share a mutual interest. The Pope spoke English quite well and specifically told Father Kicanas that he looked forward to meeting the seminarians later that morning.

Following an address and brief prayer service in the seminary chapel with the U.S. bishops, Pope John Paul, Father Kicanas, and Cardinal Cody, made an appearance on the roof of the east wing for the benefit of the thousands of people gathered between 77th and 79th streets on the east campus of the school. Arrangements had been made for the handicapped of the archdiocese to be present. They received the choice spot, immediately in front of the low roof on which the Holy Father appeared. The Holy Father actually wanted to descend to the spot to greet the handicapped personally, but his aides persuaded him that he was already behind schedule and that security arrangements had not been made beforehand.

Luncheon with the bishops in the school gym, temporarily converted into a banquet hall, was followed by the big event for the students. The Holy Father was escorted to the immense campus in the rear of the building where he met exclusively with the students and teachers of the four seminaries. It's no exaggeration to say that the students went "crazy" when the Pope appeared.

In brief remarks, the Holy Father told them that they could now see how important they are because the Pope took time to be with them. He spoke about how close to his heart he regarded seminarians and how important these years were in helping them mature in their faith. After completing his remarks, the Holy Father was presented with a soccer ball and a knitted ski cap showing Quigley South's emblem with the blue and gold school colors. Moments later a Marine Corps helicopter on the far west soccer field took the Pope to Grant Park where he celebrated the liturgy for almost a million people.