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My most significant experience as a seminarian was perhaps the election of Pope Francis, in no small part because I had the grace to be there. That Tuesday, the second day of the conclave, I guessed would be the day he was elected, so rather than going to classes, I camped out in St. Peter's Square from 10 a.m. in the morning until his election at 7 p.m. The smoke came – it was grey, no, white, and then everyone was running. I was close under the balcony in that atmosphere of joyful expectation, and then he appeared! No one had any idea who he was, but whoever he was, he radiated simplicity and humility, and in these characteristics, as well as his perpetual joy, he has been an inspiration and a model for me.

His first action as pope was to ask for prayers for Pope Benedict XVI, and I see this as very significant, as I have always seen a great continuity between the two. If Pope Francis has marked my mature appreciation of my vocation, Pope Benedict's words at the Mass for the inauguration of his pontificate were a huge inspiration at its beginning when I was in my first year in seminary: "Are we not perhaps all afraid ... if we let Christ enter fully into our lives, He might take something away from us?... No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. ... Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything." Those words touched me in a deeply personal way, and I have only grown in my appreciation of them, especially as I have seen them lived out in the pontificates of both Benedict and Francis, both of whom are my greatest living inspirations in my journey toward the priesthood.