

A PAGE MEETS THE POPE



Stonyhurst College, the distinguished Jesuit school in Lancashire, was honoured when one of its pupils was chosen to represent Jesuit students worldwide in being presented to Pope Benedict at High Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on Saturday, April 22nd, the Feast of Our Lady, mother of the Society of Jesus, and the date upon which the original Jesuits took their first vows.

Angela Page, from St. Thomas of Canterbury parish, in her final year at the College, was overwhelmed with joy to be chosen at the last minute, and concerned that she did not have suitable clothes in her backpack. She arrived in the Vatican on the Friday evening, with 90 other pupils, parents, staff and alumni, after a four day walking pilgrimage from Orvieto under the spiritual guidance of three of the College's chaplains. They began each day with mass in a local church and led the pilgrims in Ignatian meditation and prayer ending each day with night prayer in the chapels of the convents where the group stayed. The group ranged in age from 9 to 78 and walked as one through the Italian countryside, following the ancient pilgrim route to Rome, the Via Francigena, covering up to 18 miles a day. On the Friday evening, they entered St. Peter's Square, singing Jubilate Deo, flags and banners flying, still walking at a good pace, to be greeted by some 90 other pilgrims from Stonyhurst who had flown straight to Rome for the occasion.

The High Mass on Saturday celebrated the Jubilee anniversaries of the early Jesuits, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis Xavier and Blessed Pierre Favre. St. Peter's was packed, the Stonyhurst contingent, identified by their green and white scarves, having been given a block of seats near the front. After a dignified Mass presided over by Cardinal Sodano, Vatican Secretary of State, with nearly 300 Jesuit priests concelebrating, the Pope arrived to joyful applause to give to all assembled a special audience. Father General Peter Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, in a simple black Jesuit gown welcomed Pope Benedict, who then thanked and praised the Society of Jesus for its key role in the life of the Catholic church over the last 500 years and who spoke about the continuing importance of the apostolate of the Society of Jesus in terms of spirituality and education. The Pope welcomed the friends of the Society, including all alumni and alumnae, to the celebration, uniquely mentioning Stonyhurst by name. He then personally greeted a representative group of Jesuits and friends including Angela Page.

As Angela herself said, "It was a humbling but inspiring moment, an amazing privilege to have been chosen."