



Most Rev. Mitchell Rozanski, Archbishop of St. Louis, greeting Pope Francis at the conclusion of an *Ad Limina* visit.

## Distinguished Alumnus

### Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski Class of 1984

On August 25, 2020, at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski was installed for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. The Crossroads took the occasion to congratulate the archbishop and engage him in the following interview.

#### Do you have any favorite memories to share from your time as a seminarian at Theological College and The Catholic University of America?

Growing up in a predominantly Polish Catholic neighborhood in East Baltimore, I remember how much I felt my experience of the Church was expanded at Catholic University and TC. I am grateful for the strong rooting in Catholicism my upbringing in my family and neighborhood gave to me, but I felt that I was getting a much wider understanding of the Church being on the campus at CUA and at Theological College. I remember remarking to a faculty member that I felt there was so much to absorb, it was almost overwhelming. I do treasure my years at TC and CUA for such a wonderful experience.

#### How did your 20 years in parishes across the Archdiocese of Baltimore prepare you for your life ahead as a bishop?

Until my dying day, I will always cherish those 20 years of parish experience and would go back to parish ministry tomorrow if it were possible. It is a humbling, grace-filled time to be with people in such crucial moments of their lives — weddings, baptisms, funerals, hospital visits — and to be part of their journey of faith. I still miss that experience. Parish ministry taught me the importance of collaborative leadership in working with fellow staff members, parishioners, and other co-workers in the Lord's vineyard, and all this has helped me as a bishop today. I like to think of leading a diocese as shepherding a very large parish!

#### As auxiliary bishop, you served as Vicar for Hispanic Ministries. How do you look back on that experience and its impact on you and your future outreach work?

While in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, it was a joy to work closely with my sisters and brothers of Hispanic origin. One of the main impacts that working with the Hispanic community had on me was the importance of family and gathering together. I truly cherished celebrating Masses in Spanish and seeing the joy on the faces of families being together and loving their faith. A strong family life gives children a solid base to begin their lives knowing

that they are loved by God and their families. I see this as one of the great gifts the Hispanic community brings to the Church in the United States. Keeping their faith strong is so important as they continue to live in this country.

#### Do you think your reputation for being a champion of overcoming divisions may have been informed by your upbringing in a Polish Catholic family?

Certainly, my family has had a great influence upon my life and that of my brothers; I grew up in a strong and devout home. Each one of us has different personalities, likes, and dislikes. But we were united in our family life. It is difficult to witness what is going on in our country today: the COVID-19 virus has kept us apart, heightened racial tensions, a lack of civil dialogue. These things only drive us apart, exasperate isolation and loneliness, and make us turn inward on ourselves. Jesus calls us to look out for one another, to care for our brothers and sisters. It is Jesus' mandate that impels us as Christians to seek the things that unite us, rather than divide us. We see daily the effects of division and hate that bring us great woe rather than the joy to be found in the Gospel.

#### What is your biggest ministerial aspiration as you begin your life with the People of God in St. Louis?

In my homily at the Installation on August 25, I quoted Pope Francis on the role of the bishop as the Holy Father explained in *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium*. Sometimes the bishop does have to be out in front leading the people entrusted to his care; other times he must be humbly in their midst as a sign of solidarity and encouragement, and other times the bishop must stay behind, urging those who are lagging to move forward. Pope Francis has provided a clear outline of what the bishop must do in serving God's people.

#### What do you believe to be the most serious challenges for those entering the priesthood in the 21st century?

Firstly, in so many areas, our society seems to have grown hostile to the idea of faith and religion. In pursuing freedom of the individual and all that entails, we have forgotten the importance of the common good. Jesus teaches us to seek the common good, as does our Catholic faith. In a time of rugged individualism, the practice of faith can sometimes be viewed as restrictive. Yet, our faith is freeing in allowing us to serve one another. I have spoken with seminarians who have shown great courage in responding to God's call despite opposition from family members. It has to be very difficult for a seminarian to be faithful to God's call when those whom he loves object to it. The clergy sexual abuse crisis still looms as a great hindrance to the credibility of priesthood. Our priests of today, because of these obstacles, have to be rooted in prayer, Scripture, study, and knowledge of theology, and be faithful to their calling to be witnesses of the Lord Jesus at work in His Church. A much different picture than when I entered the seminary 40 years ago!

#### Can you offer some advice or encouragement for the seminarians of Theological College and all those in the process of discernment?

While the world has changed so much over these past 40 years in its approach to faith, there is still that same human longing for God. Our priests need to be solidly grounded in our Catholic faith to give voice to human longing and to be ready to point the way for those who are seeking the presence of God in their lives. I often reflect on the story of a young Joseph Ratzinger, who, as a boy, was asked by a Nazi soldier what he wanted to be when he grew up. He replied, "A priest." The soldier told him that in the new Germany priests would not be needed. But even at that age, the future Pope Benedict XVI knew that it was the time when priests would be most needed. The same is true for our age today. Our Church and society need the example, guidance, and witness of men who are committed to living out the priesthood today, more than ever!

— Suzanne Tanzi