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"The Conversion" Sculpture Dedication Speech

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“The Conversion”

Sculpture Dedication Speech

Miriam Mulva '69

Oct. 12, 2017

In John 12:24-25, Jesus says, “Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains only a grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

St. Norbert was an inspiration for his time. This sculpture, titled “The Conversion,” commemorates the moment when he faced the greatest decision of his life: Would he serve Jesus Christ before all else, or would he continue to pursue his own dreams of comfort, wealth, security and prominence?

He is a saint not because a bolt of lightning knocked him off his horse, nor because an angel revealed to him the will of God. Norbert is a saint because he allowed his life to be changed by those events and to seek nothing other than the will of God. He is holy not because of the grace he was given; he was holy because of how he shared that grace with others.

Perhaps Norbert was inspired in his home town of Xanten by the previous witness of St. Victor who died as a Martyr under the 4th century Emperor Justin the Apostate. Victor chose Jesus Christ instead of the pagan gods of Rome – and he died for that witness. Norbert knew of Victor’s heroic faith. Perhaps that is what gave Norbert the encouragement to say yes to the will of God and to stop serving the false gods of his culture.

Victor let go of his life for Christ’s sake and he gained eternal life in return. At the moment of his conversion, Norbert let go of his secure life as a deacon in Xanten and a chaplain to Emperor Henry V, and in return he embraced a life of radical discipleship following wherever Jesus led him and embracing whatever hardships came his way. Both Victor and Norbert died to themselves and Xanten so that Christ could live in them. In that self-offering of love, they found their true life both on earth and in heaven. Jesus tells us that those who die to themselves and live for him will bear much fruit. St. Victor bore fruit in how his death inspired many, including St. Norbert, to seek Christ first in all things. St. Norbert bore fruit in how he led others to an equally radical, committed life of discipleship as followers of Jesus Christ.

The witness of holy men and women continues to bear fruit today. This sculpture is a reminder to all at St. Norbert College – students, faculty and staff – that our hearts are created for God alone, and that our lives will never be fulfilled until we offer ourselves to be transformed by God’s grace even as St. Norbert was. Like St. Norbert and St. Victor of Xanten before him, we too must reject the false gods that those around us worship and serve so that we can serve only Christ Jesus and lead others to him. That was the mission of St. Norbert. That is the mission of this College: to lead people to God through a life of faith. That is the mission to which we are called. St. Norbert, pray for us. May we not only revere what you did, but become imitators of your faith now and forever.