

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 6, 2009 at 3:09pm

CUA's Symposium & Mary

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NCR Today

The Catholic University of America's symposium for the Year for Priests got underway today. The presentations were very scholarly and quite fine. Fides et ratio at their best. (I will try and give a synopsis of the talks tomorrow.) But, it was something at the end of the morning session that brought home to this CUA alumnus what a distinctive place a Catholic university is and how that distinctiveness opens up not only new avenues of thought but how it grounds us in something more substantial and permanent than any intellectual theory. Father O'Connell led the more than 100 assembled participants in the Angelus.

Prayer. And not just any prayer, but a prayer that is as old as universities themselves. A prayer that includes Scripture from the earliest centuries of the Christian Church. A prayer to the Virgin in whom eternity took flesh.

Intellectual fads come and go. The great insights of Freud are now taught as having historical interest, but they are not taught as effective psychology. Newton's physics explained much, until Einstein's theories came along and I am told that contemporary scientific minds have long since passed Einstein. There was a time before the theories of Darwin and Copernicus, and those times were not without their measure of intellectual rigor. Our knowledge is, as the Apostle Paul wrote, imperfect. But, through the centuries, through all the intellectual achievements and intellectual failures of our civilization, prayer endures.

Our prayers, too, suffer from imperfection. We get distracted. We ask for the wrong things. But the Virgin's Mary's prayers on our behalf do not suffer from our earthly imperfections. We turn to her when we cannot see any value in turning to ourselves or to our own. How fitting that a highly intellectual symposium should finish its morning's work by turning to her. THAT is what it means to have a Catholic identity.

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