



Death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Statement

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The death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who relinquished the role of Pope in 2013, brings to an end the earthly life of a man of deep faith, of gentleness and humility, and of unwavering dedication to the service of God and of God's Church.

When Pope Benedict decided to resign from his role as Bishop of Rome and head of the Catholic Church, many people were surprised, and not a few were disturbed or even dismayed. His predecessor, Pope St John Paul II, had continued steadfastly and courageously as pope in spite of the many challenges his deteriorating health posed for him personally and for the worldwide Catholic community. In doing so, he became for many a living symbol of the mystery and dignity of human suffering, which is so much at the heart of the Christian faith. Why, many people asked, did Pope Benedict not do the same?

With hindsight, of course, we now see that there are many ways to give witness to the mystery of the Christian faith. If Pope St John Paul II was a living symbol of the dignity and meaning of human life, even when it is diminished by illness and suffering, Pope Benedict, especially through his resignation, became a living symbol of that humility and detachment which are equally part of the mystery of Christian faith. In imitation of his Lord, Pope Benedict did not cling to his position of importance and of influence. Rather, "he emptied himself", freely surrendered his important and influential position, and retired to the relative obscurity of life in a small monastery in the grounds of the Vatican Gardens. This was not the act of a proud and grasping man, and much less that of a coward. Rather, it was the act of a man of profound integrity who realised, much like St John the Baptist, that he must grow smaller and fade away, so that the person, the mission, and the teaching of Jesus might more clearly be seen as the heart and soul of the life of the Church.

The willingness of Pope Benedict XVI to step aside allowed, in the strange ways of God's, providence, for something new to emerge in the life of the Church. To the surprise of many the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, was elected to the papacy and took the name of Francis. As his papacy continues to unfold, we might surmise that just as Pope St John Paul II became a living symbol of the mystery of suffering, and as Pope Benedict became a living symbol of the mystery of humility, so Pope Francis is emerging as a living symbol of the great mystery of divine mercy and compassion. Witnesses to the dignity and supreme value of human life at every stage, to that courage and humility which knows how to make way for the



Lord to bring new life and energy into the heart of the Church, and to that compassion and mercy without which human life quickly becomes intolerable: all these are desperately needed in the life of the Church, and in the life of the world, today.

So, as we now mourn the death of Pope Benedict, and entrust him with great confidence to the Lord's love, compassion and forgiveness, let us also pray in gratitude for the wonderful gift of the men whom the Lord has chosen to be the "servant of the servants of God" during this period of the Church's history. Like all of us they were, and in the case of Pope Francis are, not perfect. That is why we pray for them. At the same time, we recognise in them true men of God whose fidelity, courage, and trusting faith continue to enable us to understand more fully the extraordinary love of God made known to us in Christ Jesus.

May Pope Benedict XVI, who has been called home to the Father's house, rest in peace and rise in joy to share in the fullness of life with the Lord whom he served so well throughout his life on this earth.