

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio
Mass of Thanksgiving for the Pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI
28 February 2013



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Many are the emotions that fill our hearts this evening as we celebrate the conclusion of the Pontificate of Benedict XVI and invoke the wisdom of the Holy Spirit upon those who will choose his successor. Gratitude, hope, and prayer might be descriptive of some of the themes that mark our gathering around the altar.

My thoughts return spontaneously to 1982 when I first met then Cardinal Ratzinger. He had just come to Rome to assume his responsibilities as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and paid us a visit at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy where I was a resident. He was kind and easy to guide—one of my jobs was to serve as MC.

While there were many other occasions that allowed me to speak with him when my ministry kept me in Rome, I will never forget my first meeting with him after his election to the Chair of Peter. It was at a General Audience in St. Peter's Square in May, 2005. At the end the bishops present were invited to greet him one by one. As a Nuncio I was one of the first. He took my right hand in both of his and began: "Ci conosciamo..." We know each other. With his head he gestured up and over to the offices of the Secretariat of State and recalled the many years I had worked there.

I was deeply touched at his memory and his kindness to recall my service. I thought to myself—that will never happen again that a Holy Father tells me that we know each other.

That kindness along with so many other virtues has always characterized his ministry. As a Church we are immensely grateful to Almighty God who has given us this talented, articulate, and deeply spiritual Shepherd. I do not know if he prayed Solomon's prayer for wisdom, but it is clear that the Lord endowed him with a double measure of it.

In his final homily before the conclave which elected him in April, 2005, he talked about the desire of the human person to leave something that lasts. Ultimately, what lasts? Certainly not money or buildings or even books! In the final analysis only the human soul, created by Almighty God for all eternity will last. We give thanks that Pope Benedict XVI recognized what is truly important and spent himself completely to enrich the human soul by eloquently teaching the world about what really matters: eternal life.

“This fruit that lasts is, therefore, what we have planted in peoples’ souls—love, understanding, the gesture capable of touching hearts; the word that opens the soul to the joy of the Lord.”¹ That lasting fruit is what any authentic shepherd seeks to leave behind. As we give thanks, let us pray for the fruit that lasts. For “only in this way can the earth be transformed from a valley of tears into the Garden of God”.²

Authentically transforming the heart requires a profound commitment to the truth. Pope Benedict XVI has demonstrated an unwavering fidelity to seeking and preaching lasting truth. After they elected him, he told the Cardinals why: “I intend to serve Him alone, dedicating myself totally to the service of His Church.”³ We give thanks for the immense gifts of this “worker in the vineyard of the Lord” and we promise to continue to deepen our understanding of his instruction and learning.

We never forget as Cardinal Harvey pointed out last November that “The Church exists to respond to the great mission to preach the Gospel *ad gentes*. In this providential Year of Faith, we seek with increased vigor to serve the world with the most splendid gift of which we are capable: share with all humanity the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It is the One who softly draws His brothers and sisters near to the Throne of Grace so that they can completely fulfill their human destiny.”⁴

Pope Benedict completes his petrine ministry, exiting not through the traditional door of death, but voluntarily surrendering his office, because he perceived that his strength, energy and health no longer would allow him to fulfill the challenges of that ministry adequately. Our disappointment is tempered by admiration for such a total commitment. We have already seen ample evidence of his wisdom and so we trust his judgment.

As a people of hope we are not troubled by the senseless and mindless criticisms launched by the usual myriad of enemies of the Church. As mature Catholics we are not “tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming.”⁵ Since we were cast out of paradise witnessing to the truth has always cost something.

Yet, we are a people of hope and that hope is reinforced by the knowledge that human powers and sordid interests have long attacked the Church. The Roman Emperors, Napoleon, the know-nothings, Fascists, and many forces from the left have come and gone, but the Church still remains. Our task is to continue to live the truth in love.

Indeed this evening’s Gospel passage reiterates the role of the Apostle in the community. He must shepherd and give witness. Beyond any human talent, Peter’s pastoral ministry is based on the trust of interior communion; an intimate relationship which

¹¹ Thomas Olmsted, Open Letter to Pope Benedict XVI, 19.II.13.

² *Ibid.*

³ Pope Benedict XVI, homily, 20.IV.05.

⁴ James Cardinal Harvey, indirizzo di Omaggio al Santo Padre, 25.XI.12.

⁵ Eph. 4:14b.

cannot be qualified by human measurement, but known by the Lord who examines the heart.

Peter's witness will be with his life. The mission of the Church and each one of her disciples always remains one of following Jesus, the only model of life. The Successor of Peter also will give his life in a total commitment to the Bride of Christ which is the Church.

Therefore, we pray for the Cardinals who will gather in conclave to elect a worthy Successor to Pope Benedict XVI. Only one who loves can shepherd the Church gathered in love. We pray with the confidence that the electors will be open to the Holy Spirit and that the Lord's choice will open himself to accepting the heavy burden of the petrine office.

We also commit ourselves to continuing our prayers for the new Holy Father after his election. These are not simple times. As a part of the communion which joins the Church together we must continue our dialogue with the Father of us all so that the whole people of God might be preserved in unity and grow in charity.

As a people of faith in this special year of faith we are invited to deepen our knowledge of that faith. Perhaps that is the greatest tribute to Pope Benedict. As he dedicated his life to the study of theology and to imparting the fruit of his labors, we can recommit ourselves in this holy season of Lent to scaling the mountain to meet God in ever more profound ways. Then we descend, like the Apostles after the Transfiguration, bearing the love and strength drawn from Him so as to serve our brothers and sisters with God's own love.⁶

"The history of the Church is based on the question of Christ to every disciple: do you love me? And on the response: yes, I love you. May the Spirit, who is uncreated love, allow us to enter this luminous and blessed dialogue" as we pray for the election of a new Successor of Peter.

We all have our treasured memories of the pontificate which ended a few hours ago. They are invaluable recollections which will forever enrich our walk of faith. They reassure us in the coming days of uncertainty and expectation. However, we know that someone somewhere will say, Lord, you know that I love you and then hear the Lord say to him: "Feed my sheep."

⁶ Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for Lent, 2013, 3.