



DIOCESE *of* COLUMBUS

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we received the news of the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Words cannot capture our grief, as together, with Catholics around the world, we mourn his passing into eternity, trusting in the Lord's promise of immortality to those who faithfully unite themselves to him.

God has truly blessed the Church through this Servant of the Servants of God. Following the horrors of the Second World War, Joseph Ratzinger offered his life to God as a priest. Blessed with profound intellectual gifts, he served as a peritus at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and was an authentic interpreter of the documents of the Council. His numerous theological works, which demonstrate his profound love for the Church and a desire to know the Truth, remind us of the Fathers and the Doctors of the Church.

Called by St. Paul VI to serve as Bishop of Munich-Freising, he responded generously, until in 1981, Pope John Paul II called him to Rome, where he began his admirable service as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, until his election as Pope in 2005. Retiring from office in 2013 due to health reasons and for the good of the Church was an act of great courage and profound humility, characteristics which marked his life. During these last years, he committed himself to praying for the Church and to preparing himself to meet the Lord. That day has arrived, and we commend Him to the Lord of Mercy, who was his heart's desire.

As a teenager and college student, I began to read and study him thoroughly, along with Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac. His writings deepened my love for the Church, and when I left medical school, I went to house of spiritual discernment in Rome, the Casa Balthasar. Then-Cardinal Ratzinger was our Cardinal Protector. He was scholarly yet gentle, like someone's grandfather, who was unfailingly kind yet knew absolutely everything – a true wisdom figure.

While in the seminary, I read practically everything he wrote, and a new world – a new vision – opened before my eyes. I began to see the unity of the Faith and my own vocation in a new light. Serving faithfully beside St. John Paul II, despite his own desire to retire to write theological works, I saw, from a distance, a man who put aside his own interests once again for the good of the Church.

Living in Rome during the agony and death of St. John Paul II, I witnessed firsthand how Cardinal Ratzinger, as Dean of the College of Cardinals, held the Church together during a period of mourning and discernment. His homilies at the papal funeral and prior to the entrance into the Conclave revealed his ability to lead the Church at that critical time. It was with profound joy, standing in St. Peter's Square, that I witnessed him on the balcony and later attended his installation as Pope.

As Pope, his encyclical letters, Apostolic Exhortations, and homilies offered great clarity as he offered resistance to the dictatorship of relativism and attacks on the dignity of the human person and the human family, while proposing the truth of the Faith and the joy of the Gospel. Living as a priest in Rome with him as Pope and Bishop had a significant impact on my own vocation and priestly ministry. His

pastoral visit to the United States in 2008, under theme of “Christ our Hope” also inspired many young people to discern their vocations and remain faithful to the Lord.

However, recognizing his own physical weakness and what the Church needed for this new era, he humbly tendered his resignation, living the Petrine Ministry in a different, in a hidden way.

Words cannot express my personal sorrow. I invite all Catholics to give praise and thanks to God for the life and ministry of Pope Benedict XVI as we commend him to the Lord, asking the angels to lead him into paradise so that he may hear those blessed words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; come, share your Master’s joy.”

Yours in our Crucified and Risen Lord,

+ Earl K. Fernandez

Most Reverend Earl K. Fernandez

Bishop of Columbus

