
LONG LIVE POPE BENEDICT XVI !



Just as the new pope must become familiar with his new ministry, so must we learn about the new pope! We shall have to get used to a new face, a new name, a new way of acting. After the long grieving period we have had, I am asking you to welcome in faith and hope the one who was so quickly chosen by the cardinals. May our prayer be thanksgiving for this gift of God to His Church. May it be petition on behalf of the one who has courageously accepted the task of Peter. As we pray for the pope at every one of our eucharistic celebrations, we affirm our filial attachment and our desire to work with him for the unity of the whole Church.

UNFORGETTABLE VISITS

I have fond memories of the two meetings I had with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, once during the *ad limina* visit of the Atlantic bishops in November, 1993, just after having been appointed bishop, and in 1999. Cardinal Ratzinger had the reputation of being a “work horse,” and he had to deal with the most difficult problems. We were warmly greeted in an excellent French. It seemed as if he were carrying on a running meditation on the most controversial subjects. A man of prayer, he was also considered a theologian who kept abreast of the latest research. He knows all of the Vatican personnel for having worked there more than twenty years, and he is well acquainted with the bishops throughout the world. This will help him greatly in his new pastoral ministry which consists mostly in realising not only the unity of the Christian Churches but also unity among peoples. The Lord’s instruction to “Look after my sheep” applies to the whole world.

SALT OF THE EARTH

One of my Eudist confreres gave me one day a book containing interviews of Cardinal Ratzinger with journalist Peter Seewald. The book, *Salt of the Earth* is subtitled “Christianity and the Catholic Church at the Dawn of the Third Millennium.” I plan on reading the book in the next few days, but I would like to share with you now some of his statements. To the journalist’s question, “Isn’t it extremely exhausting, having to deal with God every day? Don’t we get tired of Him at the end, even exasperated?” the cardinal answered: “It is a necessity for me, to deal with God, because just as we must breathe every day, just as we need light and we must eat every day, just as we need the friendship of certain people, dealing with God is among the very basic elements of life. If God were to disappear suddenly, I would really be unable to breathe, in my soul. So, dealing with God has nothing boring about it. Boredom can come from certain spiritual exercises or reading, but not from one’s relation to God as such.”

GRAIN OF WHEAT

Questioned on the future of the faith and of the Church, Cardinal Ratzinger replied: “I have never imagined that I could ever turn back the direction of History. Besides, since Our Lord ended up on the cross, we can see that God’s achievements do not lead so quickly to measurable success. I believe that this is an important point. The disciples questioned him: What’s happening? How is it that things don’t seem to be moving? To these questions Jesus answered with the parables of the grain of wheat, and of the leaven in the dough, among others. He told them that statistics is not one of God’s evaluation tools. Grains of wheat and leaven trigger something basic and definitive, though you cannot see any of it, now. In this light, I believe that we have to avoid quantitative evaluations of success. We are not a commercial enterprise that can show off figures and declare: We have applied a fruitful policy and are selling more and more. Ours is a service which rests finally in the Lord’s hands. On the other hand, we cannot say that everything is breaking apart. There is also, especially among the youth of every continent, an awakening to the faith. Perhaps we must say good-bye to the idea of one Church gathering all the nations. It is possible that we are on the threshold of a new era in the history of the Church, where Christianity will be more like the grain of wheat, in small groups of seemingly no

importance but that struggle against evil and bring about good in the world; groups that open the door to God. I notice here that we are aware of many groups of that kind. True, there is no massive return to Christianity, no historical turning point. However, there is a strong presence of faith among men which gives them vitality and joy, a presence of faith which is meaningful to the world.”

VATICAN III?

Questioned about the eventual possibility of a new council, Cardinal Ratzinger quickly answered: “I would say no, not in the near future.” And he continued: “In fact, a council is an event which upsets everything in the Church, and which takes a lot of time to come to fruition. We still have a long way to go before we get the full picture of Vatican II. A Vatican III would not be a good way to achieve this. What is held regularly is the synod of bishops. I think that this is a better adapted and more realistic instrument. At these synods there are two hundred bishops from all parts of the world, with proportional representation, and they must try to analyse together the actual situation of the Church. With its vast dimensions, an ecumenical council would be an event impossible to master. Here we would have to deal with three thousand, four thousand bishops. Such vast numbers could no longer promote true sharing and dialogue.”

LET US PRAY

“God who ordains everything wisely, you made Peter, the chief of the Apostles, the stone on which you built your Church. Look kindly on Pope Benedict XVI whom you have chosen as his successor: may he be the solid rock to strengthen your people in the faith and to keep them in the same communion.”

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