



CURIA GENERALIZIA DELLA COMPAGNIA DI GESÙ

Death of Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus

2022/ 17

TO THE WHOLE SOCIETY

Dear Brothers,

The Society of Jesus shares the sorrow of the whole Church on the occasion of the death of the Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, at the same time giving thanks to God for the gift of his person to the Church and to the world.

We have many reasons to remember him with deep affection and gratitude, not only for his service to the universal Church as Vicar of Christ, but also for the esteem that he so often expressed for our Society.

During his long life, Joseph Ratzinger knew well the strengths and limitations of the Society of Jesus. His fruitful activity as a scholar and professor of theology in Germany, his work as an expert during the Second Vatican Council, and his responsibility as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, led him to encounter many Jesuits committed to theological, biblical, philosophical and canonical reflection. He engaged them in dialogue and collaborated with them, in a positive and frank manner, not sidestepping difficulties but always sincerely seeking the greater good of the Church. It is enough here to recall his deep respect for Fr. Henri de Lubac - one of the authors who influenced him most - and the interest in and esteem for the Gregorian University that he expressed during his visit in November 2006. The memory of Benedict XVI encourages us to continue theological research and study, with total dedication and seriousness, for the service of faith and of contemporary culture.

Joseph Ratzinger also knew and appreciated Ignatian spirituality. Shortly after his resignation from the pontificate, answering a question about his favourite prayers, he cited in first place the *Sume, Domine, et suscipe* of St. Ignatius. On another occasion, he said of this prayer that “it always seems too high to me, so much so that I hardly dare say it, and yet we should always, again and again, make it our own.” The second of his favourite prayers is attributed to St. Francis Xavier: “I love you because you are my



God [...]. I love you because you are you.” But we feel especially close to him because of his personal love for Jesus Christ and his passionate and constant search for the “face of the Lord,” masterfully expressed in his trilogy on Jesus of Nazareth. For this reason, the memory of Benedict XVI stays with us as an invitation to preserve and cultivate a living relationship with the person of Jesus, without which our life loses its deepest meaning.

There was no shortage of difficult challenges during the pontificate of Benedict XVI. He knew how to face them with humility, courage and constancy, giving guidance and example to the whole Church. I recall especially the dramatic and painful reality of sexual abuse by priests and religious, from which we ourselves, unfortunately, are not exempt. The way in which Benedict XVI took on himself the weight and consequences of this unspeakable sin of the Church has set us on the right path: becoming aware of this painful reality, listening to the victims, doing justice in each case, seeking ways to repair the harm that has been done, and taking steps to prevent the repetition of such failures. It is a path we must continue to travel, in an even more attentive way, advancing with the whole ecclesial community and with civil society. The integrity of the witness of our life and commitment to conversion, always possible with the grace of God, are demands of Christian, religious and priestly life that we must always keep in mind.

The Society of Jesus, gathered together in GC 35 and headed by the newly elected Superior General, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, had the opportunity to feel and relish the closeness and affection of Benedict XVI when the Pope received us in Audience on 21 February 2008. His excellent address led us to the heart of our spiritual identity and encouraged us to live, with determination and enthusiasm, the multi-dimensional mission characteristic of the Society: at the service of faith, justice, and culture, among and with the poor, thinking with the Church and in the Church, with that “effective and affective” devotion that makes Jesuits “precious and irreplaceable collaborators” of the Vicar of Christ. It was that moment of consolation and spiritual confirmation, as we witnessed the mutual and harmonious relationship between the Holy See and the Society, that -- in the words of Decree 1 of GC 35 -- invited us to live our mission “with renewed vigour and zeal,” a commitment to which we still seek to respond every day, with the help of the Lord and despite our limitations.

In resigning from the papacy, Benedict XVI gave us a brilliant lesson in humility and spiritual freedom. It showed his desire to put the good of the universal Church before everything else. Today we join with the whole Church and especially with Pope Francis in a prayer of gratitude as we remember, with admiration, the personal integrity of Joseph Ratzinger and the magisterial depth of Benedict XVI. We bid him farewell,



confident that the Lord will be gracious in receiving him in the dwelling long prepared for those who give their lives to him with generosity.

Yours fraternally in our Lord,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Arturo Sosa', is located to the right of the text 'Yours fraternally in our Lord,'.

Arturo Sosa, S.J.
Superior General

Rome, 31 December 2022
(Original: Spanish)