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EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Benedict XVI: He who spoke to us of God

A tribute by Cardinal Fernando Filoni



Trip to the USA, April 2008.

Benedict XVI was a Prophet of our time, a Teacher in the Church, a Father for all.

His most renowned biographer Peter Seewald, wrote that for some he was an uncomfortable character who troubled his adversaries, and he recalled – quoting the French philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy – that his name roused prejudices, falsehoods and even disinformation. Actually, Seewald wrote, *“Ratzinger enthralled with his noble ways, his elevated spirit, the honesty of his analyses, the depth and beauty of his words. His message can be uncomfortable, but he is faithful to the teachings of the Gospel, to the doctrine of the Fathers of the Church and to the reforms of Vatican Council II”* (Benedict XVI – *Una vita*, Garzanti 2020). I believe this to be an accurate characterisation, also from the direct acquaintance I have had with this “great Pope”, as his successor Francis has called him.

Yes, Benedict XVI was a prophet of our time. The history of prophecy in Sacred Scripture is linked to the relation between God and his People. God loves, God is jealous, God calls us continually to conversion. Benedict XVI had this mission for half a century, straddling the XX and XXI centuries, which was an epoch of great transformations in a society revolutionised by scientific research, almost omnipotent technology and the loss of the sacred. He was both a witness and a part of such a complex century.

As a professor and young collaborator at Vatican Council II, he had a profound *sensus Ecclesiae*, which is the foundation of all sound ecclesiology, detaching himself from those who wanted a break between the past and future. He loved divine Revelation, which he so fittingly interpreted, in its twofold economy of *events and words*, and through them, in harmony with the biblical style and dictates, Benedict XVI highlighted the perception of religious topicality in relation to political and social thought.

The Gospel and the high patristic tradition became his constant reference point for enriching the Christian message; he knew how to trace God's presence in history.

Benedict XVI constant lay in welcoming divine Revelation with obedience to the faith, without abandoning the role of the intellect and will, which reached a climax in his writings on Jesus, who is source and summit of Revelation. Like so few have done before or since, he showed the richness and beauty of Christ in the sublime trilogy: "*Jesus of Nazareth*"; a text that will remain in the life of the Church as a spiritual masterpiece of elevated cultural and theological profundity.

The role and value of sacred Tradition as handed down through apostolic teaching was particularly dear to him; the Church, as he taught, progresses in the Truth by assistance of the Holy Spirit through Sacred Scripture and through the memorial of the Fathers preserved, expressed and propagated. From this sacred inheritance Benedict XVI derived service to the living Magisterium of the Church, which was never superior to the Word of God.

John Paul II wanted him at his side in directing, for many years, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith; then, as the Supreme Pontiff, he became himself the attentive *Servus servorum Dei* in the Church and the world. No-one could forget those first meaningful words that he pronounced on the occasion of his election to the seat of Peter: *After the great Pope John Paul II, the Cardinals have elected me, a simple and humble labourer in the vineyard of the Lord. The fact that the Lord knows how to work and to act even with inadequate instruments comforts me, and above all I entrust myself to your prayers in the joy of the Risen Lord*" (19 April 2005).

The Prophets have transparent humility and for this reason they are either loved or hated; the humility of Benedict XVI has met the appreciation of the people, who have loved him profoundly; they have esteemed him because he talked about God and about his mercy and reminded them of his presence. Those who deciphered each aspect of his life and words with an arrogant and biased view, have lost the nobility of their souls.

So this 265th Pope of the Catholic Church, Bishop of Rome, had the mission of speaking relevantly about God to our secularised and conceited world. He accomplished this in an elevated (theologically speaking) and simple way, through writings, homilies and public discourse. He always maintained the most profound anthropological vision in his thinking, that was never detached from the Eternal: "*man loses himself when he forgets his creator, God. Forgetting God, he no longer knows how to decipher the message of his nature, he forgets his measure and becomes for himself an enigma without an answer.*" (J. Ratzinger – Benedict XVI, *per Amore*, LEV-Cantagalli, 2019). But also in relation to nature, he said that "*when we forget God, things become mute, they are only material for something, but without a why, empty of every profound meaning. If we return to God, things begin to talk*" (ib).

Benedict XVI was a father. His paternity was humble, modestly expressed and direct. Those who encountered him describe a kind man who was never enigmatic, never duplicitous, never populist or propagandistic and never moralising.

He loved the world because it is ill and in need of God. He felt that in this, the Church has an elevated mission. Perceiving help from a God whom he said was "kneeling" before us, he adored the mystery this entailed.

He should be counted among the giants of our century. We are all grateful to him, having received from him the gift of his testimony. For a brief period, I too rejoiced in his closeness and I benefited from the shadow of this majestic oak, first as Substitute of the Secretariat of State and then as Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and this allowed me to become a witness to the thinking and acting of Benedict XVI. I then also enjoyed his amiable consideration even after

his renunciation of the papacy, and I hold dear the memory of various meetings and of those brief thoughts of his that accompanied the gift of some publications with a delicacy, "*To my dear friend.*"

He will be a Doctor of the Church.

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