



A Benedictine At Heart

Spring 2005

“The Church stands and falls with the Liturgy. When the adoration of the divine Trinity declines, when the faith no longer appears in its fullness in the Liturgy of the Church, when man’s words, his thoughts, his intentions are suffocating him, then faith will have lost the place where it is expressed and where it dwells. For that reason, the true celebration of the Sacred Liturgy is the center of any renewal of the Church whatever.”

Dear Friend,

These words, written by the Holy Father while he was still Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, resonate deeply in the monastic soul. By virtue of his vows and the very rhythm of his life, the Benedictine monk is the man of the Liturgy, for the Liturgy. This is, perhaps, why there has been such a profound friendship down the years between the Abbey of Fontgombault, our “mother-house” in France, and the man who is now seated on the See of Peter.



On Tuesday, April 19th, when news came to Clear Creek of the election of the new Pope, we were all surprised — I, for one, was truly dumfounded. However, when the name “Benedict XVI” was announced the surprise was such that there was nothing more to do but go immediately to the Oratory and sing the *Te Deum*, which we did in our monastic fashion.

In his first general audience on Wednesday, April 27th, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI explained before a large crowd of the faithful why he chose this name. After recalling the memory of Pope Benedict XV, who guided the Church through the turbulent years of World War I, he said that, “the name of Benedict also evokes the extraordinary figure of the great patriarch of western monasticism, St. Benedict of Norcia, co-patron of Europe with Cyril and Methodius. The progressive expansion of the Benedictine Order, which he founded, exercised an enormous influence on the spread of

Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek

Christianity throughout the European continent. For this reason, St. Benedict is much venerated in Germany, and especially in Bavaria, my own land of origin; he constitutes a fundamental point of reference for the unity of Europe and a powerful call to the irrefutable Christian roots of European culture and civilization.” On this same occasion, the Pope also appealed to St. Benedict for help “to hold firm Christ’s central position in our lives.”



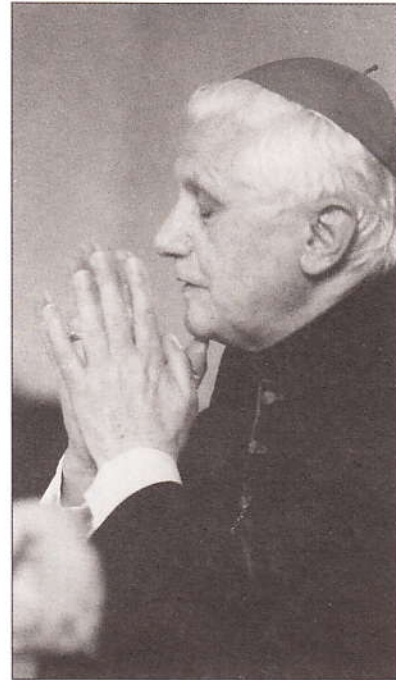
Perhaps the most memorable contact between Fontgombault Abbey and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was the liturgical symposium which took place at the monastery from July 22 to July 24, 2001. The various conferences given during those days have been edited in English by Saint Michael’s Abbey Press, Farnborough, England, under the title *Looking Again at the Question of the*

Liturgy with Cardinal Ratzinger. About 50 people attended these “Liturgical Days” as they were called, including bishops, abbots, superiors, and members of several religious communities. The learned presentations revolved around the concerns and hopes for the Roman liturgical rite. It was the Cardinal himself who had taken much of the initiative for this symposium and had given it a clear orientation.

At the close of his own lecture at Fontgombault in 2001, Cardinal Ratzinger had this to say:

“One thing should be clear: the liturgy must not be a terrain for experimenting with theological hypotheses. Too rapidly, in these last decades, the ideas of experts have entered into liturgical practice, often also by-passing ecclesiastical authority, through the channel of commissions which have been able to diffuse at an international level their “consensus of the moment,” and practically turn it into laws for liturgical activity. The liturgy derives its greatness from what it is, not from what we make of it. Our participation is, of course, necessary, but as a means of inserting ourselves humbly into the spirit of the liturgy, and of serving Him Who is the true subject of the liturgy: Jesus Christ. The liturgy is not an expression of the consciousness of a community which, in any case, is diffuse and changing. It is revelation received in faith and prayer, and its measure is consequently the faith of the Church, in which revelation is received.”

On the last morning of Cardinal Ratzinger's stay at the Abbey, the Abbot of Fontgombault recounts how, as the Cardinal was about to make his way to the car that would take him away, "I suggested we go into the church for a moment, wanting him to witness the spectacle of the low masses being celebrated at that hour; he willingly accepted." At Fontgombault there are quite a number of "side-altars", many of which are interspersed in the nave, against the pillars. More than one visitor has been struck by this sight — there have even been conversions to the Catholic faith through this experience — of a great number of monk-priests offering up, individually but in profound communion, the sacrifice of the Holy Mass, during the grand silence of the night, with just a servant whispering very softly the liturgical responses, and often a handful of the faithful at each altar. "The Cardinal knelt down on the stone floor and prayed for a few moments. Then, as we left the church, he said to me, 'Now that is the Catholic Church'."



From these little stories, *fioretti*, it should not be hard for you to imagine our joy at seeing this friend wearing the white cassock of the Vicar of Christ. If not a Benedictine by monastic profession, the new Pope certainly is a "Benedictine" by virtue of the name he has chosen and the vision he shares with all who see the need to rebuild a

Christian civilization worthy of the name, a Christendom of the 21st Century. We hope that Our Lady of Clear Creek Monastery can play a small part in that story, and this is why we continue to ask your prayers and your material aid in the great enterprise in which, despite our human weakness, we are engaged.



Although it is too soon to give any precise details, it now appears that we may very well be able to resume building this fall. Even though the resources needed to complete the project are still lacking, we are willing to make this leap of faith

With this in mind, I would only ask you to please be as generous as your means will allow in helping us to complete this holy house of St. Benedict — what could well be a small cornerstone in the

great rebuilding of Christian civilization to which Pope Benedict XVI is calling each and every one of us. And again, thank you for all of your past support and most especially for your prayers.

br. Philip Anderson, Prior

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