

+Requiem Mass
For Pope Benedict XVI

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey
January 4, 2023

[The wise man] will give his heart to resort early to the Lord that made him, and he will pray in the sight of the most High. He will open his mouth in prayer, and will make supplication for his sins. For if it shall please the great Lord, he will fill him with the spirit of understanding: And he will pour forth the words of his wisdom as showers, and in his prayer, he will confess to the Lord. And he shall direct his counsel, and his knowledge, and in his secrets shall he meditate.¹

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My Very Dear Sons,

There is, perhaps, no power upon the earth that more forcefully pushes back the darkness and sadness of earthly mortality than the light of true wisdom, the wisdom that shines forth from God in a soul. Even the pagans of old felt this to a degree, although it is only with the life of Faith in Christ that the gift of wisdom acquires its full stature and leads those who open their hearts to it toward the very Kingdom of Heaven.

Pope Benedict XVI of blessed memory was a man of many virtues and talents, which already have frequently been invoked and celebrated, and this will surely continue for a very long time to come across a broad spectrum of religious and academic reflection. Indeed, churchmen and secular commentators will continue to remind us of these accomplishments in days and weeks to come. Today, it will suffice to underline some of the more salient elements of this life given to God, especially those aspects that speak to us Benedictine monks, and to place it all in the perspective of the passing into eternity of a great man of God.

Having taken as Pope the name of our founder, Saint Benedict, the Patriarch of monks of the West, this son of the Bavarian Ratzinger family never ceased to praise the contemplative monastic life we lead. In his general audience of April 9th, 2008, he evoked the figure of the Saint from Nursia, pointing to the crucial role the latter played at a particularly important moment in history.

[His significance]... is explained in light of the general context of his time: straddling the fifth and sixth centuries, "the world was overturned by a tremendous crisis of values and institutions caused by the collapse of the Roman Empire, the invasion of new peoples and the decay of morals". But in this terrible situation, here, in this very city of Rome, [Pope Saint] Gregory presented St Benedict as a "luminous star" destined to point the way out of the "black night of history."²

¹ Eccli. 39:6-10.

² Cf. also John Paul II, May 18, 1979.

One important dimension of the life of Pope Benedict, one that touched us in a special way, was his liturgical wisdom. His book entitled *The Spirit of the Liturgy* has become a classic and has contributed greatly to calming the storm of liturgical controversy that followed the Second Vatican Council. Beyond the book it seems that the climax of this man's efforts in things liturgical came with the publication of the Motu Proprio *Summorum Pontificum* accompanied by a Letter to bishops providing its correct interpretation. Here is a passage of that letter to bishops, often quoted, but which we might repeat once again here, as it seems to reveal to us the heart of the deceased Pontiff and the essence of his wisdom concerning the Sacred Liturgy. The particular point here is the relationship between the older and the newer Roman missals.

There is no contradiction, wrote the Pope, between the two editions of the Roman Missal. In the history of the liturgy there is growth and progress, but no rupture. What earlier generations held as sacred, remains sacred and great for us too, and it cannot be all of a sudden entirely forbidden or even considered harmful. It behoves all of us to preserve the riches which have developed in the Church's faith and prayer, and to give them their proper place. Needless to say, in order to experience full communion, the priests of the communities adhering to the former usage cannot, as a matter of principle, exclude celebrating according to the new books.³

On an even broader level, across the great multitude of his writings, Cardinal Ratzinger and then Pope Benedict appears truly as the Theologian of the Church, ever pondering the Word of God, especially with respect to the mystery of the Church. In an interview he gave in 1997, before being elected to the See of Peter, speaking about the fact that Saint Therese of Lisieux had been made a Doctor of the Church, Cardinal Ratzinger offered the following remarks.

It is important, in our scientifically minded society, to have the message of a simple and deep experience of God, and a teaching about the simplicity of being a saint: to give, in this time, with its extremely action-oriented approach, to teach that to be a saint is not necessarily a matter of great actions, but of letting the Lord work in us. ...You don't have to make great things. I am poor, spiritually and materially; and to give myself into the hands of Jesus is sufficient. This is a real interpretation of what it means to be redeemed; we don't have to do great things, we have to be confident, and in the freedom of that confidence we can follow Jesus and realize a Christian life.⁴

This theologian of the Church found, of course, an even greater model of the contemplative attitude in the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially at the moment of the Annunciation.

Mary reflects, he said, she ponders on the meaning of this greeting [of the Archangel]. The Greek word used in the Gospel to define this 'reflection,' 'diologizeto,' calls to mind the etymology of the word 'dialogue.' This means that Mary enters into a deep

³ Letter to Bishops on *Summorum Pontificum*, July 7, 2007.

⁴ From a conversation between Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger and George Weigel on September 20, 1997, quoted in the latter's article "Joseph Ratzinger, Doctor of the Church?" *First Things*, January 3, 2023, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2023/01/letters-from-rome-1>.

conversation with the Word of God that has been announced to her, she does not consider it superficially but meditates on it, lets it sink into her mind and her heart so as to understand what the Lord wants of her, the meaning of the announcement.⁵

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For many years both the Church and the world greatly benefitted from the precious wisdom poured forth by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and then by Pope Benedict XVI, as a “shower” of theological and spiritual understanding, along with the entire ministry of his high office. May he now, as intercessor, from the balcony of Heaven, where we trust he stands already, rain down upon us through his prayers the dew of divine grace and understanding of which we are still in much need. No doubt, by the infinite kindness and goodness of God, he will continue to fulfill both his names of Joseph, protector of the Church and of the family, and of Benedict, the “blessed one.” May he rest in the beatific light and peace about which he so often and most eloquently spoke. Amen.

⁵ Wednesday audience on Dec. 19, 2012.

⁶ Eccli. 39:6-10.