



STATEMENT

DATE: December 31, 2022

RE: Death of Pope Benedict XVI

FROM: Most Reverend John O. Barres, Bishop, Diocese of Rockville Centre

This morning, upon hearing of the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, we give thanks to God with Our Holy Father Pope Francis for the leadership of a great theologian and pope whose holiness and missionary spirit impacted immensely the 20th and 21st centuries.

Growing up in Nazi Germany and experiencing firsthand the bitter fruits of Nazi ideology, Pope Benedict XVI understood that ideas have consequences in history.

As a result, throughout his life, as a priest, professor, bishop, cardinal and pope, he championed the Catholic belief in the harmony of Faith and Reason – a principle that is so critical to the unity of Truth and so vital to Catholic identity, missionary activity, harmonious ecumenical and interreligious charity and peace in the world.

The magnitude of the historical influence and significance of Pope Benedict's systematic, liturgical and biblical theology cannot be completely known in the present. But it will be great, and it will grow over time like the influence of the teachings of St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. John Henry Cardinal Newman.

For example, Pope Benedict XVI's biblical theology and spirituality, so beautifully expressed in the three volumes of *Jesus of Nazareth*, his apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* and his call to all Catholics to read, study, meditate, pray, contemplate and live the inspired Sacred Scriptures are already key dimensions of the New Evangelization.

Echoing his predecessor, Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict encouraged a new and more integrated maturity in biblical scholarship – a “comprehensive exegesis” rather than exclusive use of one method alone (*Fides et Ratio* 55 and the Foreword to *Jesus of Nazareth* I). The result is a ferment in biblical scholarship and its application in the pastoral sphere that continues to gain ground and momentum.

Pope Benedict called us to a “sacramental mysticism” that is “social in character” and agape driven (*Deus Caritas Est* 14). Harnessing the power of the Mass, harnessing this “sacramental mysticism,” leads the Church to a dynamic Gospel of Life and Social Justice mission in our globalized society.



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In his weekly audiences, Pope Benedict XVI engaged in a “catechesis of prayer” in which he explained how authentic spiritual life and spiritual growth have to be founded on the rock of the objective truths of the Catholic faith – the truths of the Creed, the Sacraments, Moral Teaching and Prayer.

During his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI invited the universal Church to live three special years: a Year of St. Paul (2008), a Year for Priests (2009), and a Year of Faith (2012).

During the Year of St. Paul, he asked every Catholic to rediscover Paul’s letters, Paul’s Road to Damascus Conversion and his missionary spirit.

During the Year for Priests, Pope Benedict XVI invited priests to deep conversion, deep holiness, deep mission and a devotion to the Patron of all Priests, St. John Vianney, the Cure of Ars.

In this time, as always, the Holy Father echoed the words of the First Letter of Peter in his life and relationship with priests: “I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ and one who has a share in the glory to be revealed. Tend the flock in your midst...” And he asked all of us to pray and sacrifice for a new harvest of holy and zealous 21st century priests.

Finally, during the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI asked us to open our minds, hearts and souls to an expansion of the gift of faith in the Digital Age.

Today, we pray for the soul of this great pope and give thanks for how the Holy Spirit led him and inspired us.

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