

Pope Benedict XVI will be long remembered as a wise and loving pastor of souls. We priests discern our vocation as a call to serve other people, and Pope Benedict accomplished this in countless ways, even entering areas of leadership he did not aspire to acquire. During the legendary papacy of Pope St. John Paul II, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger stood at his side as a stalwart companion helping the charismatic pope keep the Church afloat across troubled waters. Working with different Vatican agencies, Cardinal Ratzinger ensured consistent teaching within the Church. Although he earned a public reputation as a tough-minded cleric, people who personally visited him in the more private venues he loved so much spoke of his warm hospitality. They just loved being with the guy.

Upon the death of Pope John Paul, the college of cardinals elected Joseph Ratzinger as the next successor to St. Peter. He accepted this role because the Church needed him, and he only desired to serve. As Pope Benedict XVI, he proclaimed the gospel through many forms of communication: books, encyclicals, public appearances, and even social media. He presided over three World Youth Days, mega-events taking place in Germany, Australia and Spain. People noticed his devotion to prayer and pastoral outreach. On his trip to the United States Pope Benedict issued a moral challenge on topics ranging from social justice to abortion. He was the first pope to meet in person with victim-survivors of sexual abuse and set the Church on the difficult path of honesty and repentance, a journey we still walk in hopes for a better future.

By stepping down from the papacy, Pope Benedict showed another way to serve: through a retired life of prayer and study. Pope Francis has enjoyed his friendship and advice.

The readings we heard today were proclaimed at Pope Benedict's funeral nine days ago. We offer them again to complete this novena of prayers for him. We hear from the prophet Isaiah the promise that those who dwelled in the ignorance of sin will rejoice in the glory of the Lord. We hear of Jesus' humble acceptance of his own death on the cross.

And from the First Letter of Peter, we hear these inspiring words about what Christ has obtained: In great mercy, God "gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Our hope is toward an inheritance that is imperishable and kept in heaven for us. The letter continues with words that must have resonated deeply with a pope who served the Church in ways that caused him personal sacrifice: "In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Suffering can bring respect to the individual, but far greater is suffering endured for the praise and glory of God.

As we reflect on the life of this great pope, he may inspire us to accept the responsibilities God places into our hands even when they cause personal sacrifice. They will greatly satisfy us because we've contributed our small part toward the greater honor and glory of God.