

## **POPE EMERITUS BENEDICT XVI: Vatican Radio Interview with Thomas Cardinal Collins**

**Vatican Radio:** Your Eminence, welcome to Vatican Radio. It's a bit of a sad and somber moment for us, but we'd like to talk a little bit about your memories of Pope Benedict, Joseph Ratzinger.

You were named archbishop of Toronto by Benedict XVI, as pope, and later created cardinal by him, in fact, in one of the last consistories in his pontificate, about a year before his resignation. Could you just share with us some of your memories of the late Holy Father?

**Cardinal Collins:** Well, the time when I first really met him was when we had, in 2006, an ad limina visit of the Canadian bishops, which bishops do every five years or so. And so it was my turn as archbishop of Edmonton to meet the Holy Father. And so I went in, and that's really the only time I've had a lengthy time with Pope Benedict. And he was just so very gentle and very kind. You know, people often speak of that. The kind of gentleness and loving presence which he had was a real sense of holiness. And so he asked me about the diocese, [of] which I was the bishop.

And then we talked about how to reach out to young people, how to care for families, and things of that nature. And so I was just very touched by his presence, just gentleness and kindness.

And then, of course, shortly after that, it was around the time when I was archbishop of Toronto, and a few years later, I was made a cardinal by Pope Benedict. And I remember coming with my two sisters, and it was so, so wonderful. We were there the day after the cardinals were created. And we were in the big audience hall there. And each one of us had a chance to go up, and it was it was a great joy for me to present my two sisters, Catherine and Patricia, to Pope Benedict. And he was just just so loving. And that's the sense people have, I think, with him, just so kind.

So those are the main occasions in which I met him. I did not really know him that personally, but I've known him, of course, through his writings and through just the way he would speak and lead the Church.

**VR:** And in fact, Joseph Ratzinger, the man, has had a profound influence on the Church through his writings, through his teachings, not only as Pope but already as a young priest. He served as an emeritus, an expert, at the Second Vatican Council, later as a profound theologian, as prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the side of Saint John Paul II. What do you see as Benedict's legacy, the most significant gifts that he leaves for the Church?

**CC:** Well, I think his partnership with Pope John Paul was a very great blessing for the Church. They had different approaches, different backgrounds. Pope John Paul was more of a philosopher and a poet, [a] dramatist. And Pope Benedict, or Cardinal Ratzinger at the time, was certainly the greatest – one of the greatest, if not the greatest – theologian of the 20th century and maybe beyond. So I think the partnership there was extraordinary. You see several of the – not only of the teachings of Pope Benedict when he was *pope*, but I think the teachings of Pope John Paul, for example, *Veritatis splendor* and things like that. Many of the teachings, I think, certainly had the influence of Cardinal Ratzinger.

I think that what we see in him is a great sense of the personal relationship with Christ. If indeed, I hear his last words were, “Jesus, I love you,” and that is maybe the summary of his work. Jesus, I love you. And he used his head and heart and hands, his whole self, to proclaim that. And as a theologian, I think even people I've heard – I wasn't there, but I've heard people who saw him as a professor when he was a young professor – they sensed something different in him. He wasn't just an academic theologian. He was a man of incredible intellect, of massive learning, but of a deep piety and a deep “Jesus, I love you” was at the heart of his life, even when he was a great professor. And so I think that's the thing that touches the heart of the things he wrote and which will continue for millennia yet to come. That that sense, as he said, is not simply acceptance of a message, but it's an encounter with the person of Christ. And I think that is throughout all of his writings.

**VR:** And one final question. You yourself have served as a priest now for 50 years and for many years as a bishop and archbishop and now a cardinal. A pope always has an influence, not just for the universal Church, but for the particular churches. Can you talk about Pope Benedict's influence on the Church in Canada?

**CC:** Well, I think it's really remarkable that when he was in office as pope... I think his teachings guided us very much. And I think he had, I remember he had a great bit of wisdom for all bishops. And when we're talking about having, you know, some somebody once mentioned we should have some kind of a parliament of bishops in Rome to kind of govern the Church or whatever... And he said the best thing a bishop can do for the universal Church is to be a good bishop in his diocese. That's the best thing you can do for the universal Church. And I think that is that's I've always thought of that. I think all the bishops think of that, that if you try to serve faithfully, to teach clearly, I'll proclaim the faith with clarity and charity, then I think that's what Pope Benedict taught us how to do. Certainly with charity, a more gentle, loving man would be hard to find.

But also with clarity. And that's why we see, even in this time, as we mourn his death, we see different people, you know, attacking and so on, as you might expect. It's a tribute to him, a tribute to him. What a great tribute, that he who proclaimed the faith with clarity and charity is mourned by so many who love him and love him because he loved Jesus. "I love you." He loved the Lord. But also people... he exercised his responsibilities. Ezekiel says the shepherd must speak the truth. And if he speaks the truth, that he is doing his duty before the Lord. And this gentle, gentle man spoke the truth. And that sometimes made people react. And that reaction is a tribute to his integrity and to his witness.

He was just an *amazing* man. Very, very amazing and a true model of a bishop and an exemplary pope. And I don't know whether he'll be named a Doctor of the Church or not, but certainly he should. But it's not for me to say. But even now, he is a *teacher* of the Church, and people like his books, like *Introduction to Christianity*, and many other things. He wrote a lot of little books. You know, he didn't write some great huge thing except maybe his volumes on Jesus of Nazareth – which is interesting, "Jesus, I love you." But he guided us so beautifully. And that, I think, will continue to guide us in the centuries and millennia to come.

**VR:** And in just a couple of days, we'll be celebrating with Pope Francis the Requiem of Pope Benedict, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Any final thoughts as we prepare for our final farewells?

**CC:** No, I think it's something where I think we just.... Well, the words that come to my mind are well done, good and faithful servant. That's who he was. He said, "I'm a coworker in the truth. I am a worker in the vineyard of the Lord. That's all he ever sought to be. And he did that *faithfully* all the days of his life, right to the end. And I think that's what we're so sad to lose him, although at his age, advanced age, we would expect it, obviously, but so deeply touched by his holiness, his wisdom, which will be forever a blessing for the whole Church and for all of us.