

FOREWORD

From his discreet retirement inside the Vatican, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI accompanied the life of the Church between 2013 and 2022 with his prayer and the ailments of old age. The German pope, who had been labeled by some as conservative and opposed to change, had made a revolutionary decision: Aware that he had lost the strength necessary to carry out his role as Roman Pontiff, he resigned his office with an admirable freedom of spirit.

The man who was elected to succeed St. Peter in April 2005 had a long history behind him. Joseph Ratzinger was one of the most outstanding theologians of the Catholic Church in the 20th century. When he was called by St. John Paul II to work with him in the Roman Curia, he put all his wisdom at the service of the universal Church. The one-time university professor soon became a key figure in the Catholic world and on the international scene. However, his growing importance never detracted from his humility nor his discretion. The first public words he pronounced after his papal election characterized these traits of his personality: He defined himself as “a simple and humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord.”

As an example, I would like to relate a personal anecdote, to show the real character of Benedict XVI. Some

media have labeled him as the Grand Inquisitor, the *Kardinal Panzer*, or God's Rottweiler. As his pontificate progressed, and through his travels, the image changed little by little, although the vision of Benedict XVI as a cold German professor still lingers in many people's minds.

I worked at a pontifical university in Rome for seventeen years, which gave me the opportunity to see Cardinal Ratzinger on a few occasions. In our first meeting, I was struck by his simplicity, his friendliness, his gentle manner, and a kind of physical fragility that made me want to protect him. As you can see, a very different image from the one spread by some in the media. In October 2005, I greeted the new pope when I was introduced as rector of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. Benedict XVI, with a smile, said to me in perfect Italian, *Ci conosciamo!* (We already know each other). It surprised me that he recognized one person among thousands that he had met, and we had met very few times. He immediately asked me very specific questions about the university, showing a clear knowledge of the institution. Between 2005 and 2008, I was able to greet him approximately fifteen times. He always had words of affection, personal, as if we were old friends. The day I bade him goodbye when I was leaving Rome and returning to Argentina, he exclaimed in a very Italian expression: *Pecato*, which could be translated as "What a pity," alluding to my academic work. If I could summarize my meetings with the pope, I always felt that I was a unique person who interested him. With diverse styles and different personalities, it

can be said that Benedict XVI, like his predecessor St. John Paul II, was an expert in humanity.

The book in your hands presents only an outline of his life and teaching. I have followed an approach similar the biographies I wrote on St. John XXIII and St. Paul VI. I pray to God that reading these pages will help us to become a little more, as the episcopal motto of Ratzinger and Benedict XVI says, *cooperators of the truth*.

ROME, DECEMBER 31, 2022

DAY OF THE DEATH OF BENEDICT XVI