

## Pope B16 and the young pilgrims from UK



In a split second I thought: not another one of those pranks! However I looked again as the sender, a close friend of mine would simply not do such a thing. At that very moment my phone rang - another friend confirming the breaking news. Immediately I got back onto my phone and flicked through my twitter account... everything I could read in my timeline was Pope Benedict has resigned, Pope Benedict has resigned, Pope Benedict has resigned.

My first reaction was of shock and utter disbelief.

Why is he resigning? And can he do this? were pressing questions... Where do I begin? Looking back I understand my ignorance in Canon Law did not help but to be honest, this is probably something Catholics are not taught at school. At the same time, I have only lived during two Pontificates and JP2 stayed in office until the end, so naturally my first reaction was that the job of a Pope was until death.

As the day unfolded, I came to understand that the resignation of a Pope is defined not only by Canon Law but also by a norm promulgated by Pope JP2 in 1996 which recognizes that a vacancy to the office of the Bishop of Rome, i.e. the Pope, can occur as a result of death or a valid resignation. This at least put that matter to rest.

Many other questions were asked, but soon my mood changed to think about the Pope's amazing Pontificate of only 8 years. Many have called him a transitional Pope and even he has described himself as a small Pope, but the truth is that for those who remember the Papal visit to the UK in 2010, he will be no small or transitional Pope, on the contrary he will be more like THE ROCK. Pope Benedict's visit to the UK was a very important moment for Catholics in the UK especially for us, the young people of the church.

Particularly for me, Hyde Park was a turning point in my life. I remember when the Pope said: 'The Lord be with you' and we all exploded: 'and also with you'. Yes indeed, we were saying the words we

say every single Sunday but \*to the Pope\*, if this was really what being 'in communion' with our Pope felt like, then communion was good.

Later during the Homily, listening to his words, I felt something special: his words were so immensely profound, relevant and clear. It was like opening a little window in the corner of my life and letting a flood of light in - his words full of much nourishment and teaching. I can only describe it as an enlightenment which awakened a desire to get closer to God and to learn more about my faith and my church. Thankfully, towards the end there was more as the Pope invited us to attend World Youth Day in Madrid, an offer taken up not only by me but by another 3000 British pilgrims too, a totally unprecedented number of UK attendees at any World Youth Day ever.

We left London in the middle of the riots and arrived in Madrid's scorching summer heat where we joined 2 million others. Pope Benedict was again impeccable with his words, his teaching, his wisdom and a gentleness like a loving father. I will never forget the storm and lightning we shared in the Vigil at Cuatro Vientos, which was a near biblical experience. Pope Benedict stayed put with us, like a German Shepherd, and we all got soaking wet.

B16 has undoubtedly been a tremendous gift to young people in the UK. His visit and later WYD Madrid has restored the confidence in our faith. He has taught us to be true to the values of our Catholic faith amidst the increasing secularization around us. He has always encouraged us to experience Jesus Christ as a friend through prayer but also through service to others. He has given us the strength to live what we believe.

Coincidentally, I was thinking recently how different could Rio2013 be to Madrid11 since it's only one World Youth Day after the other? Well now we know it will be very different nonetheless as we will have a different Pope!

Personally - and like many others pilgrims in the UK - it will be difficult to forget the impact of B16's solid teaching of the Catholic Faith and events like The Papal Visit to the UK and World Youth Day Madrid will not be easily forgotten. Finally, even as he leaves his job, his testimony of humility and detachment teaches me that being a Pope is not a position of power but of service to others.

I will miss Pope Benedict in Rio de Janeiro but I trust in the decision that he has taken and I look forward to celebrating Rio2013 with our new Pope in earnest.

World Youth Day Rio is now set to mark the beginning of the new pontificate as the biggest event to be attended by our new Pope and yes, all eyes will definitely be on him in World Youth Day Rio2013.

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