

How Pope Francis' 'new joy' surprised Benedict XVI



.Munich, Germany, Sep 12, 2016 / 04:23 pm (CNA/EWTN News).- Pope emeritus Benedict XVI has said he is satisfied with the papacy of Pope Francis and sees “no contradictions” between their pontificates.

“Yes, there is suddenly a new freshness in the Church, a new joy, a new charisma that addresses the people, which is something beautiful. Many are thankful that the new Pope now approaches them in a new style. The Pope is the Pope, it doesn’t matter who it is,” Benedict said in his newly published collection of interviews.

The collection, published as *Last Testament*, consists of his interviews with journalist Peter Seewald. Seewald had previously interviewed him for *Salt of the Earth*, *God and the World*, and *Light of the World*.

Archbishop George Ganswein, Prefect of the Papal Household and personal secretary of Benedict XVI, took part in the latest book’s Sept. 12 launch with Seewald in Munich. Archbishop Ganswein’s remarks excerpted and interpreted the former Pope’s words to Seewald.

In Benedict XVI’s own words, he sees “no breach anywhere” between his pontificate and that of his successor.

“New accents yes, but no contradictions,” he told Seewald. “He is a man of practical reform. And that is the courage with which he addresses problems and searches for solutions.”

Benedict praised Francis’ “direct affection for the people.”

“That is very important. He is definitely a man of reflection. And a thoughtful person, but at the same time someone who is used to always being with people,” the emeritus Pope said. “And perhaps I was actually not with the people enough.”

For Benedict, Francis’ election was a “big surprise.” He saw that the new Pope “spoke on one side with God and on the other side with the people. I was really glad to see that. And happy.”

He said he had previously not experienced the warmth and “very personal affection” of Archbishop Bergoglio.

“That was a surprise for me!” Benedict recollected.

Archbishop Ganswein said the book provides expanded understanding and even corrects the record about Benedict XVI in several ways. It explores the reasons, motives and exact circumstances of the Pope’s “puzzling resignation” and it discusses his relationship with Pope Francis.

It discusses Benedict’s personal views on the different crises and so-called scandals of his papacy.

Benedict admits he did not properly assess the political meaning of his 2006 Regensburg speech on the nature of faith and reason in Christianity and Islam. Media controversy focused on his citation of a Byzantine emperor who criticized Islam’s Prophet Muhammad.

Archbishop Ganswein said the interviews also show “the profoundly human dimension” of the man born Joseph Ratzinger.

“To him, power never meant anything, and he described the ‘happiest time’ of his life as those twelve months or so after his ordination on June 29, 1951 when he worked for a year as a young parochial vicar at Sacred Blood Parish in Munich,” Archbishop Ganswein said at the book launch.

In the new interviews, Archbishop Ganswein finds “a very distinct and new intimacy,” such as on topics like how Benedict’s mother was born before her parents married.

There is even a bit of mirth.

“He never laughed so much in his other interview books. And never cried,” the archbishop said.

“Despite his superior and awakened intelligence and formation, he does not resemble, even from afar, a power-loving person who would love to be bigger than he really is or a scary high-inquisitor at all like he is often distortedly misrepresented by his “non-friends,” said Archbishop Ganswein.

For Benedict XVI, his almost unprecedented resignation was a chance “to disengage from the large crowds of people and adjourn into this greater intimacy.” It was “another way to remain faithful to my ministry.”

Asked if he regrets his resignation, Benedict XVI told Seewald “No. No, no. I see that it was right every day.”

The doctor had told him that he was no longer allowed to fly across the Atlantic, Archbishop Ganswein recounted. The next World Youth Day had been moved to 2013 instead of 2014 due to the World Cup. Otherwise, Benedict XVI would have tried to endure until 2014.

“But I knew: I can’t do it anymore,” Benedict said.

Benedict XVI rejected as “total nonsense” conspiracy theories that he resigned due to extortion or conspiracy. There was no practical pressure.

“You may never yield to coercion. You may not flee in the moment of the storm, but must withstand,” he said. “You can only step back if nobody is calling for it. And nobody demanded it in my day. Nobody. It was clear to me that I had to do it and that this was the right moment. It was a complete surprise for everyone.”

Archbishop Ganswein finds “an astounding amount of self-criticism, flavored with self-irony” in Benedict’s interviews with Seewald

Benedict still delights in the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, during which he was a theological consultant. But he also sees problems with that epochal event.

“We thought then overly theological and did not consider what public image these things would have,” he said. There were also “many destructions and delusions.”

Benedict saw himself as a progressive at the time, when others would denigrate him with claims he was a freemason, or incapable, or heretical.

The former Pope says he is frequently astonished by his “naïveté” and the “brazenness” with which he spoke at the time.

At the same time he now describes himself as a “true fan of John XXIII” and the “total unconventionality” of the canonized Pope who called the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.

The former Pope Benedict now writes Sunday homilies for four to nine people.

“I am really more of a professor – someone who ponders and considers intellectual things. I wanted to be a real professor for life.”

Such is the life now of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.

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Peter Seewald - Catholic News Agency