

***"JESUS, I love you"***. These reportedly were the last words uttered by the Pontiff Emeritus Benedict XVI as he passed to eternal life on December 31, 2022. The existence and purpose of a man so accomplished in the intellectual sphere was distilled in this simple phrase – acknowledging his Creator, his Lord, his Redeemer. I write this reflection to complete a personal circle that began on May 1, 2010 in Turin, Italy when the Holy Father passed by me in the Popemobile en route to the Shroud exhibition and Papal Mass. Now 12-1/2 years later he who venerated the image of the Crucified One ended his earthly journey completely entrusted to the One who is Risen. When the schedules for his laying-in-state and Funeral Mass were announced on New Year's Day I hastily arranged a journey to Rome to join the faithful in praying for his soul and to honor his beautiful legacy of love through his scholarship and teaching.



***The Lord said to them, "let us go to the other towns and preach to them for I came for this."*** Mark 1:38 By happy coincidence my fellow passenger on the flight from San Francisco was a priest with whom I was well-acquainted. This friend was inspired to pay his respects because of the lasting influence that Joseph Ratzinger made on his vocation – years ago he had grown to see it primarily as a functional role in service to the people. It was the then-Cardinal's 1995 document, *Life and Ministry of Priests* that re-awakened in him the essence of the priesthood which is permeated by the Paschal Sacrifice of Christ. In it contained a saying from St. Charles Borromeo which caused my friend to change his attitude on how he ministers:

*"When you administer the sacraments, meditate on what you are doing. If you celebrate Mass, meditate on what it is you are offering. If you recite the psalms in choir, meditate on whom you are speaking to and what you are saying to him. If you guide souls, meditate on whose blood has washed them...."*

The majority in attendance in St. Peter's Square for the Requiem Mass would not have read many, if any, of the treatises, encyclicals and works produced by Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> for which he is recognized as a theological giant. Yet the spectrum of people paying their respects - from royalty to wage earners, local Romans to travelers from far flung continents, were spurred on by this man whose main motivation was to teach of JESUS and the truth & beauty of His Church. How opportune that the chilly mist of that morning gave way to illuminating sunshine – relativism's metaphoric fog clearing for the celebration of life of one of its most vociferous opponents.

***“Someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.”*** *Jn 21:18* My seat neighbor during the

Mass was a longtime officer with one of the foreign consulates in Vatican City. She remarked whereas John Paul II and Francis made gregarious efforts to personally connect with every staff member, Pope Benedict in his

own refreshing way would cordially but briefly acknowledge the person and their role in the diplomatic operations. Lacking pretense, his reserved nature would not permit any excessive banter within a packed schedule. Such was his fate to become the Vicar of Christ, despite his wish to retire as a Cardinal and pursue further studies, with the hope of spending his final years with his beloved older brother. Providentially, his almost eight years on the Chair of Peter shined a light on his prior intellectual output with the bonus of his weekly catecheses given in



the general audiences. Thanks be to God for the gift of his papacy. Eternal reward grant unto him, O Lord. Pope Benedict, we are grateful to you for feeding the sheep and we pray for your intercession – *“Doctor, subito!”*