

Pope Benedict XVI deserves congratulations on his resignation

Pat Perriello | Feb. 13, 2013 NCR Today
Benedict Resigns

During the last years of the John Paul II papacy we watched major deterioration as he clung to life and power. At that time, I wrote more than once of his need to retire or for a process to be initiated to vacate the See of Peter because of his inability to carry out his duties as pope.

Fortunately, I believe Pope Benedict XVI observed from a much closer venue what was happening to his mentor and to his church. His decision to resign likely stems from his realization that hanging on did no service to him or the church. Why shouldn't the pope be able to live out his final days in peace and contentment as any other person? We force the retirement of priests, bishops and cardinals. The pope is no less human than they. I am truly happy for Benedict that he seems to have made his decision at a time when he can still enjoy the remainder of his days with family and friends, doing things he enjoys, such as listening to Mozart and playing the piano.

More importantly, for the future, the pope has set a precedent I believe those who follow him will find difficult not to emulate. Pope John Paul II, for his part, felt compelled by the example of his predecessors to remain in office until he died. Benedict XVI's courage in taking this step will enable others to follow him into retirement when the appropriate time arrives. His humility, one of his most admirable qualities, enabled him to recognize that his continuance in office was not essential for the future of his church. He has done a huge favor for the church in that it will no longer need to limp along for significant periods of time without competent leadership.

As a liberal Catholic, I of course hope we will at least see some movement in a more progressive direction from his successor. But I believe Catholics of every stripe can wish the very best for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and his future happiness. We can also agree that only prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit can best lead our church into the future.

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