

Tributes to 'courageous' Pope Benedict XVI



Archbishop Vincent Nichols, President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and Archbishop of Westminster, said: "Pope Benedict's announcement today has shocked and surprised everyone. Yet, on reflection, I am sure that many will recognise it to be a decision of great courage and characteristic clarity of mind and action."

"The Holy Father recognises the challenges facing the Church and that "strength of mind and body are necessary" for his tasks of governing the Church and proclaiming the Gospel.

"I salute his courage and his decision."

"I ask people of faith to keep Pope Benedict in their prayers. We Catholics will do so, with great affection and the highest esteem for his ministry as our Holy Father remembering with joy his Visit to the United Kingdom in 2010. Pray, too, for the Church and all the steps that must take place in the next weeks. We entrust ourselves to the loving Providence of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit."

Cardinal Keith O'Brien, Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh, said: "Like many people throughout the world, I was shocked and saddened to hear of the decision by Pope Benedict XVI to resign. I know that his decision will have been considered most carefully and that it has come after much prayer and reflection."

"I will offer my prayers for Pope Benedict and call on the Catholic community of Scotland to join me in praying for him at this time of deterioration in his health as he recognises his incapacity to adequately fulfil the ministry entrusted to him."

"I hope I will also be able to rely on the prayers of Catholics across the world for the Cardinal Electors as we prepare to travel to Rome in order to participate in the conclave, which will be convoked to elect a successor as Bishop of Rome and Supreme Pontiff."

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, president of the US bishops' conference, said Benedict XVI had unified Catholics. He said: "The Holy Father brought the tender heart of a pastor, the incisive mind of a scholar and the confidence of a soul united with His God in all he did. His resignation is but another sign of his great care for the Church. We are sad that he will be resigning but grateful for his eight years of selfless leadership as successor of St Peter."

Though 78 when he elected pope in 2005, he set out to meet his people - and they were of all faiths - all over the world. He visited the religiously threatened - Jews, Muslims and Christians in the war-torn Middle East, the desperately poor in Africa, and the world's youth gathered to meet him in Australia, Germany, Spain and Brazil.

He delighted our beloved United States of America when he visited Washington and New York in 2008. As a favoured statesman he greeted notables at the White House. As a spiritual leader he led the Catholic community in prayer at Nationals Park, Yankee Stadium and St Patrick's Cathedral. As a pastor feeling pain in a stirring, private meeting at the Vatican nunciature in Washington, he brought a listening heart to victims of sexual abuse by clerics.

Pope Benedict often cited the significance of eternal truths and he warned of a dictatorship of relativism. Some values, such as human life, stand out above all others, he taught again and again. It is a message for eternity.

He unified Catholics and reached out to schismatic groups in hopes of drawing them back to the Church. More unites us than divides us, he said by word and deed. That message is for eternity."

From Lambeth Palace, Justin Welby, the newly elected Archbishop of Canterbury, praised the Pope for his "dignity, insight and courage". He said: "It was with a heavy heart but complete understanding that we learned this morning of Pope Benedict's declaration of his decision to lay down the burden of ministry as Bishop of Rome, an office which he has held with great dignity, insight and courage. As I prepare to take up office I speak not only for myself, and my predecessors as Archbishop, but for Anglicans around the world, in giving thanks to God for a priestly life utterly dedicated, in word and deed, in prayer and in costly service, to following Christ. He has laid before us something of the meaning of the Petrine ministry of building up the people of God to full maturity.

"In his visit to the United Kingdom, Pope Benedict showed us all something of what the vocation of the See of Rome can mean in practice - a witness to the universal scope of the gospel and a messenger of hope at a time when Christian faith is being called into question. In his teaching and writing he has brought a remarkable and creative theological mind to bear on the issues of the day. We who belong to other Christian families gladly acknowledge the importance of this witness and join with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in thanking God for the inspiration and challenge of Pope Benedict's ministry.

"We pray that God will bless him profoundly in retirement with health and peace of mind and heart, and we entrust to the Holy Spirit those who have a responsibility to elect his successor."

David Cameron, Prime Minister, issued a brief statement this morning. He said: "I send my best wishes to Pope Benedict following his announcement today. He has worked tirelessly to strengthen Britain's relations with the Holy See. His visit to Britain in 2010 is remembered with great respect and affection. He will be missed as a spiritual leader to millions."

Edward Leigh MP, the chairman of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Holy See, expressed his surprise this morning at the news of the impending retirement of Pope Benedict XVI.

"I know I can speak for many Catholics in public service and others around the country when I commend the Pope for the work he's done. The relationship between Great Britain and the Holy See is stronger now than at any time since the Reformation, and much of that is thanks to the determined efforts of the Holy Father."

"We were all amazed by the tremendous response of the British public to the State Visit of Benedict XVI in 2010. I was deeply moved by His Holiness's address in Westminster Hall, when his spirituality and immense intellect provided a thought-provoking insight into history, the nature of government, and the modern world.

"While surprised and saddened by his departure from the Chair of Saint Peter, I am sure the members of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Holy See will join me in praying for the future health and wellbeing of Pope Benedict. We also wait in prayerful anticipation for the coming conclave when a new pontiff will be chosen.

Lord Sacks, the Chief Rabbi, who travelled to Rome to visit the Pope following the papal visit to Britain, noted his "gentleness" and thoughtfulness. "I was honoured to welcome Pope Benedict XVI to Britain on behalf of non-Christian faiths in 2010 and spend time with him during a visit to the Vatican in 2011. I saw him to be a man of gentleness, of quiet and of calm, a deeply thoughtful and compassionate individual who carried with him an aura of grace and wisdom. I wish him good health, blessings and best wishes for the future."

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