



The Holy See

INTERVIEW OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO THE POLISH TELEVISION

Sunday, 16 October 2005

Thank you, Holy Father, for granting us this brief interview on the occasion of the Pope's Day, which is being celebrated in Poland.

On October 16th, 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla became Pope, and from that day Pope John Paul II, for more than 26 years, as the Successor of St. Peter, as you are now, led the Church together with the bishops and cardinals. Among the cardinals, your Holiness was also present, enjoying the appreciation and esteem of your predecessor: a person about whom Pope John Paul wrote in his book "Arise, and let's be on our way" – and here I quote "I thank God for the presence and help of Cardinal Ratzinger. He is a proven friend," John Paul II wrote.

Holy Father how did this friendship begin and when did your Holiness meet Cardinal Karol Wojtyla?

A. I met him personally during the two pre-Conclaves and Conclaves of 1978. Naturally I had heard about Cardinal Wojtyla, especially in the context of correspondence between the Polish and German Bishops in 1965. The German Cardinals told me about the great merits and contribution of the Cardinal of Cracow and how he was the soul of this historic correspondence. I had also heard from university friends about his stature as a philosopher and thinker. But as I said, the first personal encounter took place during the Conclave of 1978. I liked him from the beginning and, thanks to God, without any merit on my part, the then Cardinal immediately made friends with me. I am grateful for this trust that he showed me. Above all, when I watched him pray, I saw and understood, that he was a man of God. This was my first impression: a man who lives with God and in God. I was also impressed by the unprejudiced cordiality with which he made my

acquaintance. On various occasions he addressed these pre-conclave meetings of the cardinals, and it was here I had the opportunity to experience his stature as a thinker. Without using big words, he created a heartfelt relationship and immediately after his election as Pope he called me to Rome several times for talks and in the end he appointed me Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Q. So this appointment and convocation to Rome didn't come as a surprise?

A. It was hard for me, because when I was made Bishop of Munich, with a solemn consecration in Munich cathedral, I felt I had an obligation towards this diocese, almost like a marriage. So I felt bound to this diocese. There were several difficult unresolved problems and I didn't want to leave the diocese that way. I discussed all of this with the Holy Father, with great frankness and he was very paternal towards me. He gave me time to reflect and said he also wanted to reflect. Finally he convinced me that this was the will of God. Thus I could accept this calling and this great responsibility, which wasn't easy and which was beyond my capacity. But trusting in the paternal benevolence of the Pope and in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I could say yes.

Q. This experience lasted for more than 20 years...

A. Yes, I arrived in February 1982 and it lasted until the death of the Pope in 2005.

Q. In your opinion, Holy Father, what are the most significant moments of the Pontificate of John Paul II?

A. We can see it (the Pontificate) from two perspectives: one "ad extra" – toward the world – and the other "ad intra" – toward the Church. With regard to the world, it seems to me that through his speeches, his person, his presence, his capacity to convince, the Holy Father created a new sensitivity for moral values, for the importance of religion in the world. This has created a new opening, a new sensitivity towards religion and the need for a religious dimension in man. Above all, the importance of the Bishop of Rome has increased immensely. Despite the differences and despite their non-recognition of the Successor of Peter, all Christians have recognized that he is the spokesman of Christianity. No one else in the world, on an international level can speak in the name of Christianity like this and give voice and strength to the Christian reality in the world today. He was the spokesman of the great values of humanity for non Christians and other religions too. He managed to create a climate of dialogue among the great religions and a sense of common responsibility that we all have for the world. He also stressed that violence and religion are incompatible and that we must search for the path to peace together, taking common responsibility for humanity. Regarding the situation of the Church, I would say that, first of all, he knew how to infuse enthusiasm for Christ in young people. This is something new, if we think of the youth of late sixties and seventies. That youth has become enthusiastic for Christ and for the Church and for difficult values. It was his personality and charisma that helped mobilize the youth of the world

for the cause of God and for the love of Christ. In the Church, he created a new love for the Eucharist. We are still in the Year of the Eucharist, called by him with so much love. He created a new awareness of the greatness of Divine Mercy; and he deepened devotion to Our Lady. In this way he guided us toward an internalizing of the faith and, at the same time, toward a greater efficiency. Of course we have to mention his essential contribution to the great changes in the world in 1989, contributing to the collapse of socialism.

Q. During the course of your personal encounters and your talks with John Paul II, what made the most impression on Your Holiness? Could you tell us about your last meetings, perhaps of this year, with John Paul II?

A. Yes. I had two encounters with him at the end: one was at the “Gemelli” Hospital, around February 5 or 6; and the second was the day before his death, in his room. During the first encounter, the Pope was visibly suffering but was perfectly lucid and very aware. I had gone to see him about work because I needed him to make certain decisions. Though visibly suffering the Holy Father followed what I was saying with great attention. He communicated his decisions in a few words, and gave me his blessing. He greeted me in German and confirmed his trust and friendship. I was very moved to see how he suffered in union with the suffering Lord, and how he bore his suffering with the Lord and for the Lord. I also saw his inner serenity and how totally aware he was. The second encounter was the day before his death: he was visibly in great pain, and was surrounded by doctors and friends. He was still very lucid and he gave me his blessing. He could not talk much. The patience he showed at this time of suffering was a great lesson for me: to see how he believed he was in the hands of God and how he abandoned himself to the will of God. Despite his visible pain, he was serene, because he was in the hands of Divine Love.

Q. Holy Father, often in your speeches you evoke the figure of John Paul II and of John Paul II you say he was a great Pope, a venerated late predecessor. We always remember the words you pronounced at the Mass last April 20, words dedicated precisely to John Paul II. It was you, Holy Father, who said – and here I quote – “it seems as though he is tightly holding my hand, I see his laughing eyes and I hear his words, which at that moment he is directing to me in particular: ‘do not be afraid!’” Holy Father, finally a very personal question: do you continue to feel the presence of John Paul II, and if you do, in what way?

A. Certainly. I’ll begin by answering the first part of your question. Initially, in speaking of the Pope’s legacy, I forgot to mention the many documents that he left us – 14 encyclicals, many Pastoral Letters, and others. All this is a rich patrimony that has not yet been assimilated by the Church. My personal mission is not to issue many new documents, but to ensure that his documents are assimilated, because they are a rich treasure, they are the authentic interpretation of Vatican II. We know that the Pope was a man of the Council, that he internalized the spirit and the word of the Council. Through these writings he helps us understand what the Council wanted and what it didn’t. This helps us to be the Church of our times and of the future. Now for the

second part of your question. The Pope is always close to me through his writings: I hear him and I see him speaking, so I can keep up a continuous dialogue with him. He is always speaking to me through his writings. I even know the origin of some of the texts. I can remember the discussions we had about some of them. So I can continue my conversations with the Holy Father. This nearness to him isn't limited to words and texts, because behind the texts I hear the Pope himself. A man who goes to the Lord doesn't disappear: I believe that someone who goes to the Lord comes even closer to us and I feel he is close to me and that I am close to the Lord. I am near the Pope and now he helps me to be near the Lord and I try to enter this atmosphere of prayer, of love for our Lord, for Our Lady and I entrust myself to his prayers. So there is a permanent dialogue and we're close to each other in a new way, in a very deep way.

Q. Holy Father, now we are waiting for you in Poland. Many are asking when is the Pope coming to Poland?

A. Yes, if God wills it, and if my schedule allows for it, I have every intention of coming to Poland. I have spoken to Msgr. Dziwisz about the date and I am told June would be the best time. Naturally everything still has to be organized with the various institutions. It's early yet, but perhaps next June, God-willing, I could come to Poland.

Holy Father, in the name of all of our television viewers, thank you for this interview.

Thank you.