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### **Celebration of the Election of Pope Benedict XVI**

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

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Homily

April 24, 2005

*Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous deeds. He has revealed to the nations His saving power. (Psalm 97:1-2)*

These words from the Entrance Antiphon for the Fifth Sunday of Easter express our joy on the occasion of the election of Pope Benedict XVI as our Holy Father, the 265th Pope in an unbroken succession from St. Peter.

The election of the Vicar of Christ on earth is a “mighty deed” of the Holy Spirit that causes us to lift our voice and heart to God. This acclamation affirms our confidence in God who “reveals to the nations” the saving power of His love.

It would be hard to estimate how many people: Catholics, Christians, believers and unbelievers, even skeptics and cynics – children of God all – became attentive to a tiny chimney top in Rome, waiting to see the white smoke and hear the peal of bells that signaled the choice of the “Catholics’ Pope.” To my amazement all became Pope-watchers. With similar levels of interest they wanted to know what kind of Pope the new Pope would be.

Equally revealing was the scene ten days prior when leaders and citizens from all over the world gathered on the occasion of the funeral of Pope John Paul II. On the day after his election our new Pope Benedict referred to the crowd at his predecessor’s funeral as a “choral wave of faith, love and solidarity” which had been drawn together “to form a great family of people, through the unifying force of Truth and Love.” (First Message of Benedict XVI to College of Cardinals, April 20, 2005)

This display, the new Pope suggested, was an extraordinary experience of “the power of God who, through His Church, wishes” to accomplish this oneness. He attributed to the Christ-like pontificate of Pope John Paul II the achievement of not only “confirming the Christian people in their faith,” but making “the entire human family feel more united.”

My word to you today – believers and skeptics alike is this: Watch this new Pope carefully. Listen to him attentively and with an open heart. He has an extraordinary grasp of the circumstance of the world today. He is deeply attuned to Jesus Christ and animated by hope. He is uniquely gifted to guide the Church – indeed all people of good will who choose to listen – through some of the greatest perils facing us at the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium. In his last public celebration as Dean of the College of Cardinals, then-Cardinal Ratzinger preached at the Mass “Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice” “For the Election of the Roman Pontiff.”

Cardinal Ratzinger commented on the letter to the Ephesians, and offered to us the words by

which St. Paul warned the Church of his day about the peril of “being tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine.” (Eph 4:14) Cardinal Ratzinger, who would – barely twenty-four hours later - be placed at the helm of this boat, the Church, talked about an “adult faith” that does not underestimate or trivialize evil in the world. At the same time he acknowledged the “vindication by our God,” (Is 61:2) which has been manifested in Jesus Christ, the sign of God’s favor and grace to the world.

“With joy,” he said “we hear the news of the divine mercy of Christ” which alone is able to “put a limit on evil.” But this mercy, the Cardinal reminded us, “is not a grace that comes cheap.” It is a complete and unwarranted gift that came at the dear price of Christ’s own death. (Mass Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice, April 18, 2005)

This mature adult faith, he said, “is not a faith that follows the trends of fashion and the latest novelty.”

This “clear faith based on the Creed of the Church,” the Cardinal warned us, will be ridiculed because it stands in stark contrast to relativism, which does not recognize anything as definitive.

Then the future Pope laid out the dangerous facts in clear and strong language. “We are building a dictatorship of relativism whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.” (Mass Pro Eligendo ...)

The adult faith, of which the soon-to-be chosen Pope referred, and to which you and I are called, is formed and rooted in friendship with Christ, and it will inevitably cost us a share in the Cross of Christ, a share in the suffering love requires.

It is only in Christ – who in today’s Gospel proclaims Himself as “Way, Truth, and Life,” that we are able “to distinguish the true from the false, and deceit from truth.” The Incarnate Christ alone is capable of revealing to man the truth about himself. (cf. Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, no. 22)

Dear friends it seems to me that it is the enticement of this mature, clear, adult faith that so many people of all creeds, races, and ages saw in Pope John Paul II, and now dare to look for in his successor.

We are all looking, ultimately, for a kind of truth that is embedded in love and leads to eternal life. It is the hope for this truth, I would suggest, that caused so many people to gather around their radios and televisions and computer screens last Tuesday to watch for the white smoke. And at 7:10 p.m., Rome time, Tuesday, April 19, 2005, we heard the words, “Habemus Papam,” “We have a Pope!” ... and a few moments later Pope Benedict XVI smiled and waved at the waiting world.

Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous deeds! (Psalm 97:1)

So, is this “God’s Rottweiler?” or “a simple, humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord?” Is he to be dismissed as an “arch-conservative,” the “enforcer of rules?” or embraced as a Holy Father, who at 78 years old, has trustingly accepted his new ministry in answer to God’s call? Pope Benedict XVI is a most eloquent teacher of the faith. He has never hesitated, it should be acknowledged, to defend the Church’s teaching from misrepresentation and dilution by those

who will always find it too demanding to follow Christ consistently. In reading some of his addresses of the past months I am astounded by his capacity to grasp the situation of the world and apply to it the compelling and healing principles of the Gospel.

This morning in the Mass that inaugurated his ministry as Supreme Pontiff, the teacher, Pope Benedict, was also revealed as shepherd and pastor.

He spoke of how his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, had shown to us in the observances of Holy Week and Easter the face of suffering, and had invited us to touch the wounds of Christ. Now the new Pope wished also to greet the whole world, but with the testimony that "The Church is alive! The Church is alive" and, he added, "The Church is young!"

Explaining the significance of the pallium stole he had just received as Pastor and Shepherd of the Church, Pope Benedict said that the circle of Lamb's wool that he would wear around his neck was a reminder of the sheep he wished to place upon his shoulders: the lost sheep – the sick – the abandoned – all to whom the Church is called in a special way. (Cf. Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, Mass of Inauguration, April 24, 2005)

When the sheep is lost in the desert, the Pope explained, Christ Himself leaps to His feet to go out and rescue His beloved. We are all carried by Christ. And the Pope reminds us today: We are all invited – at the same time – to carry each other. (Ibid.)

Yes, dear friends – The Church is alive! The Church is new! The Church is young, even while it moves and breathes with men, women and children of all ages.

The Church, confronted with so many examples of the external deserts in which God's flock is forced to travel, is uniquely able to nourish the internal desert of the human heart and soul, restore it to life, and place it on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. (Cf. Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, Mass of Inauguration, April 24, 2005)

How will we in this Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph continue to be alive with this youth and newness that the Pope proclaims? No other way than by listening to the one – Pope Benedict XVI – on whose shoulders Christ Himself has mercifully placed us.

In Pope Benedict XVI the world has a pastor who has been held close to God in prayer and love. Let us never cease praying for him.

In Pope Benedict XVI we have a man of mature, adult faith who dares not trivialize evil in the world, but who knows that the power of God's divine mercy in Jesus Christ is forever more powerful. Let us never cease to follow his lead with filial trust.

In Pope Benedict we have a Holy Father, a mere human being nonetheless chosen to be the Vicar, the earthly representative, of Christ. Let us commend him to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Apostles, and Mother of the Church. Let us entrust him to the care of the angels and the intercession of the great communion of saints – those who have gone before us – but also ourselves called to echo and make manifest a wondrous communion in the life and love of Christ.

Viva il Papa! Long live Pope Benedict XVI!  
Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever!