



Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland

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**Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland, D.D.
Bishop of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph
on the Election of
Pope Benedict XVI
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(Kansas City / April 19, 2005) The white smoke has wafted across the Sistine Chapel, the bells confirmed its message and we have a new Pope. The College of Cardinals has elected one of Pope John Paul's closest friends to be his successor. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, the former Archbishop of Munich and now the former prefect of the Congregation of the Faith, enters the ranks of the papacy as Benedict XVI.

It seems superfluous to repeat the biography of our new pope as he is already so well known. His twenty four years as prefect in Rome and his close working relationship with our late pope have given him a visibility which few Cardinals attain. The son of a Bavarian farming family, his youthful years were affected by the Godless philosophies of the dying Nazi regime. He was in his late teens when Benito Mussolini was summarily executed in the streets of Milan and Adolph Hitler took his own life in April of 1945.

An academic with few equals and a teacher of considerable influence he taught philosophy and theology at some of Germany's finest institutions of higher learning. Also a prolific writer, now that he is pope, intellectuals will scrutinize his vast output of essays, reflections and books in an attempt to forecast the direction of his pontificate. Fluent in many languages Americans will be pleased to discover that he finds it easy to converse in English. Another Joseph, the late Cardinal Frings of Cologne, thought so highly of the young professor that he invited him to be his consultor at the Second Vatican Council. His presence at the Council gives him a distinct advantage in interpreting the purpose and the results of this epic event which has shaped the future of our Church. Perhaps more importantly, his participation in the many Synods of the Church, which were the logical development of the Council, will serve him well as he begins his pontificate. Multiple memberships, on various Vatican Commissions and agencies, have given him an unique overview of how the Holy See works and he should be well aware of

its administrative strengths and deficiencies.

Once again the Cardinals have selected a non-Italian to be the successor of Peter. This should prepare us for the possibility that in future conclaves the choice may go beyond the confines of Europe. The centuries-old mold has been broken and the Church, of necessity, will continue to become more international in its leadership and growth.

Personally I would like to ask our latest Holy Father why he selected the name Benedict. Some day he may answer that question. Maybe he is an admirer of Pope Benedict XV who spent his life as a pope vainly pleading for peace as he watched the terrible slaughter spawned by the First World War. I would like to think that he was influenced by the great Saint Benedict of Monte Cassino, a man of extraordinary wisdom and holiness, an ardent evangelizer and the author of that magnificent famous rule which champions common sense, a life of moderate asceticism devoted to prayer. These credentials would befit any pope or bishop or layperson.

Some will think of Benedict XVI as just "another John Paul II." This could be a grave mistake not supported by the history of the papacy. Each pope becomes the Vicar of Christ influenced by his own teachers and mentors but he is moved by the Spirit often in ways which one never foresees. Beginning tomorrow we will pray for Benedict XVI in every Mass so that the Spirit of God may guide him in the pastoral care of all those for whom Christ lived and died and rose again.