

Bishop Paprocki: Pope Benedict ‘An Authentic Example Of Faithfulness’

by Andrew Hansen
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SPRINGFIELD - Bishop Thomas John Paprocki of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois issued the following statement in response to the death of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI:



“Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI was an authentic example of faithfulness to God and Catholicism, living and preaching the Gospel message with truth and passion. Always writing and teaching, his warm smile, gentle demeanor, and pastoral approach to explaining and living out the Catholic faith inspired millions and brought people closer to Christ. His reverence toward the Eucharist, the Mass, and the sacraments are examples for us today on how we should all view and respect these treasures of the Catholic faith. His steadfast defense of our faith’s teachings and traditions and remaining faithful to them, despite the pressures of the secular world and from inside the Church, is the mark of a true leader.

“To this day, I am humbled Pope Benedict appointed me as the ninth bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. I had the honor of meeting with him several times. I will forever remember his friendliness and compassion. His theological genius and his ability to communicate our rich and oftentimes difficult theology to the people in a clear and understandable way was most impressive. The Catholic Church lost an incredible and humble man, but his legacy leaves a lasting impression on the faithful and our Church.”

On his way to the airport to fly to Rome in 2010, Bishop Thomas John Paprocki, then auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Chicago, received a phone call from then-Cardinal Francis George of the Archdiocese of Chicago, telling Bishop Paprocki that Pope Benedict XVI appointed him bishop of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. A few days later in Rome, during a papal audience, Bishop Paprocki had the opportunity to personally thank Pope Benedict for this appointment, which this picture captures.

For the complete story about this photo, Bishop Paprocki wrote this reflection in the June 14, 2020 edition of *Catholic Times*. This story occurred when he was an auxiliary bishop in the Archdiocese of Chicago:

On Monday, March 29, 2010, I was on my way to O’Hare International Airport when I received a message that Cardinal Francis George, then Archbishop of Chicago, had called me. He knew I was on my way to Rome and wanted to talk to me before I got on the plane. I was in the car with another priest, and I did not know if the cardinal wanted to talk to me privately, so I waited until I got to the airport to call him back.

As soon as the priest dropped me off at the airport, I went inside and called the cardinal. He said, “Good, I’m glad I got hold of you before you took off. Can you talk?”

I looked around and said, “Well, I’m in the terminal at O’Hare, but I can talk. What’s up?”

Cardinal George, who was always right to the point without a lot of small talk, said, “The Holy Father is ap-pointing you to be Bishop of Springfield in Illinois.”

I had heard some rumors to that effect, but rumors are just that: rumors, so when you hear something officially, it still takes you somewhat by surprise.

After I told the cardinal that I was honored to accept the appointment, I said, “You know, I’m on my way to Rome, and I plan to attend the Pope’s General Audience on Wednesday. If I get the opportunity, should I say some-thing to the Holy Father about this?”

Cardinal George replied, “Well, it’s still under pontifical secret, so you would want to make sure no one overhears you.”

Sure enough, at the Pope’s General Audience that Wednesday morning, I was seated on the stage next to three other bishops near Pope Benedict XVI. There was only a small group of bishops present that day because all diocesan bishops were required to be in their own dioceses for Holy Week. As an auxiliary bishop at the time, I had the opportunity to go to Rome since Cardinal George would be taking all of the Holy Week and Easter liturgies at Holy Name Cathedral. Of the other three bishops at the General Audience, two worked in the Roman Curia and one was retired. Since I was the youngest in seniority, I was last in line to greet Pope Benedict after he finished his talk.

When I walked up to the Holy Father, there was no one else nearby, so I introduced myself and said that I had just received word that he had appointed me to be Bishop of Springfield in Illinois. I thanked him for the appointment and for his confidence in me, assuring him that I would do my best to try to be a good bishop. He just smiled and nodded. But I do have a great photo of that moment with Pope Benedict XVI!