

S2



Priests for Scotland
Vocations Awareness Week

Pope Benedict: In Service of Truth

Introduction

This week the Catholic Church in Scotland celebrates Vocations Awareness Week. 'Vocation' means calling, specifically a calling from God. During this week we're going to consider the lives of six people – three men and three women who responded to God's call with generosity, courage and determination.

In S2 we consider the life and the vocation of Pope Benedict XVI

Prayer

O God, you chose your servant Pope Benedict XVI to preside over your Church. We thank you for the years of his faithful service. We pray that, after having served as the Vicar of your Son on earth he may enjoy your abundant blessing in this life and, at life's end, be received by your Son into eternal glory. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Background

Troubled Times

Pope Benedict was born on the 16th April 1927 in Bavaria, Germany. He was baptised in the local parish Church the very same day! Needless to say, he wasn't born with the name Pope Benedict! His name was Joseph Ratzinger. His father, a policeman, was also called Joseph and his mother was called Maria. He was the youngest of three children. He had a brother called George and a sister called Maria.

During the late 1920's fascism began to rise throughout Europe, especially in Germany and Italy. Indeed, Bavaria, proved to be hotbed of Nazi ideology.

In 1929, the Great Depression began following the Wall Street Crash. The great depression was the longest, deepest, and most widespread depression of the 20th century. Its effects were particularly severe in Germany which was struggling to rebuild its economy after the First World War. There was widespread unemployment and poverty. The Nazi party began to gain widespread support.

My Dad – “The Anti-Nazi”

Benedict’s father, Joseph (Senior), was a policeman. He spent a great deal of his time investigating the activities of Nazi thugs known as ‘brownshirts’. His investigation of their criminal activities led to several threats against his life and his family.

Due to these threats the family had to move home frequently and Benedict and his brother and sister had to regularly change school. As the power and influence of the Nazis increased, Joseph (Senior) was demoted and transferred to other investigations. Pope Benedict’s brother Georg said: "Our father was a bitter enemy of Nazism because he believed it was in conflict with our faith".

My Cousin – Victim of the Nazis

The Ratzinger’s opposition to Nazism was hardened by an incident in 1941, when Benedict was just 14. Pope Benedict had a cousin with Down’s Syndrome who was just a few months younger than him. German state "therapists" came to the boy’s house and informed his parents of the government regulation that prohibited mentally handicapped children from remaining in their parents’ home.

In spite of the family’s pleas, the representatives of the Nazi state took the child away. The Ratzinger family never saw him again. Later the family learned that he had "died," most likely murdered, for being “undesirable”.

For Reflection/Discussion

Troubled Times: Pope Benedict was baptised on the day of his birth! Do you know when you were baptised? Do you the name of the Priest who baptised you?

My Dad – the ‘Anti-Nazi’: Pope Benedict’s family were constantly under threat due to their opposition to the Nazis. Today there are still millions of people who live under the threat of being persecuted for their beliefs. Can you find out about Christians, particularly, in the Middle East who are persecuted for their beliefs?

My Cousin – Victim of the Nazis: In line with Catholic teaching, Pope Benedict has always strongly opposed the use of Euthanasia. How do you think the experience of losing his cousin may have influenced his attitude on this issue?

Pope Benedict: In Service of Truth

The Call

Pope Benedict's biographers often mention four factors that played a role in Pope Benedict's decision to become a priest:

The Family

The Catholic faith was extremely important to Pope Benedict's family. The family prayed together, attended Mass together and even fasted together! Faith wasn't just for Sundays or for special times - it was a major part of the family's everyday life! Pope Benedict's great-uncle was a Priest and his brother George also became a priest.

The Culture

The part of Germany where Pope Benedict was born and brought up, Bavaria, has retained a strong Catholic culture. To this day, it's not unusual that men and women in Bavaria would answer the call to serve the Church as Priests and Religious Sisters.

The Hero

As a young boy, Pope Benedict's local bishop was a man called Micheal Von Faulhaber. We're told that the young Pope Benedict was greatly impressed by him. Bishop Von Faulhaber was a noted academic who specialised in Archaeology. In 1916, at the height of the First World War, he was awarded the Iron Cross – one of Germany's highest military honours – for his pastoral care of German soldiers at the front line.

The Protest!

When he was twelve, Pope Benedict was asked by one of his teachers what he intended to do when he left school. The teacher was an ardent Nazi. Benedict replied that he wished to become a Priest. In front of the whole class, the teacher made fun of Pope Benedict and encouraged all his classmates to ridicule him. While he already felt called to be a priest, biographers report that this incident greatly strengthened Benedict's resolve to follow God's plan for his life.

For Reflection/Discussion

The Family: Faith mattered to Pope Francis' family. Is faith a major part of your life and the life of your family?

The Culture: Pope Benedict's culture was supportive of the idea of people serving God as Priests and Religious Sisters. Do you think our culture in Scotland would be supportive of that same idea? If not, why not?

The Hero: Pope Benedict looked up to Bishop Von Faulhaber. Do you know your Bishop? When and where did you meet him?

The Protest: Benedict's teacher and classmates ridiculed his desire to become a priest. How would you react if someone in your class wished to become a Priest or Religious Sister?



Pope Benedict: The Call Answered

Beginnings

Pope Benedict began his training to become a priest when he was only twelve years old! The seminary (training college for Priests) he attended was, however, closed only a few months after he started due to the outbreak of the Second World War and Benedict resumed his studies at his previous school.

All the pupils at the school were compelled to join the Hitler Youth – the Nazi Youth Movement. Those who didn't join were charged extra school fees and faced possible imprisonment. Benedict joined the Hitler Youth but managed to avoid attending their rallies and training camps. A sympathetic teacher regularly supplied 'excuse notes'! Benedict's luck wasn't to last. At the age of 16, he was conscripted into the German airforce. In May of 1944, he deserted and speedily surrendered to American forces.

Pope Benedict eventually resumed his training for the Priesthood in 1945 and was ordained a priest in 1951. Throughout his training, Benedict was recognised as being exceptionally intelligent. After being ordained a Priest, he wasn't placed in a Parish but encouraged to take up a career in teaching at various universities in Germany. His students reported that he could be quite shy but was always very helpful!

Becoming a Bishop

Benedict was appointed a Bishop in 1977. He took as his episcopal motto *Cooperatores Veritatis* (Co-workers of the Truth). He was appointed a Cardinal in 1978 by Pope Paul VI.

To Rome

In 1981, Pope John II asked Benedict to come and work with him at the Vatican. John Paul and Benedict had known each other many years and were good friends. John Paul asked Benedict to be the Prefect *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*. Although the post has a very complicated title, Benedict's new job was to clarify Catholic teaching on difficult and often complex issues. Benedict was heavily involved in the writing of the new Catechism of the Catholic Church. This book, originally published in 1992, sums up the beliefs of the Catholic Church.

The Election

Following the death of John Paul II, Benedict XVI was elected Pope in 2005. He became the 265th pope and, at the age of 78, he became the oldest person to have been elected pope for over 300 years. The last pope named Benedict was Benedict XV, an Italian who reigned from 1914 to 1922, during World War I (1914–18). Benedict XVI was a great admirer of his namesake, especially his efforts to bring peace to the world during World War One.

For Reflection/Discussion

Beginnings: For a large part of his life, Benedict worked as a teacher. Do you think this experience would have helped him when he became a Bishop and later the Pope? If so, why?

Becoming a Bishop: When he became a Bishop, Benedict picked as motto 'Co-workers of the Truth'. Why do you think he picked this motto and not another? Would his childhood experiences of the Nazi regime influence his choice of motto? If so, how?

To Rome: Prior to becoming Pope, Benedict sought to clarify what Catholics believe and why they believe it. Do you think it's important that we know as much about our faith as possible? If so, why?

The Election: Pope Benedict chose the name 'Benedict' because he admired Benedict XV. What Popes do you admire and why?

Pope Benedict: Key Moments

World Youth Day - Cologne 2005

Pope Benedict's first Apostolic Visit abroad was to World Youth Day in Cologne in 2005. World Youth Day is a Catholic Youth festival held every few years in different countries through the world.

In Cologne, speaking to over one million young people, Pope Benedict spoke about the importance of Sunday Mass: "Do not be deterred from taking part in Sunday Mass, and help others to discover it too. This is because the Eucharist releases the joy that we need so much, and we must learn to grasp it ever more deeply, we must learn to love it!".

World Youth Day 2008 - Sydney

The 23rd World Youth Day and Pope Benedict's 2nd was held in Sydney, Australia. Addressing 500,000 young people, Pope Benedict gave them a huge challenge... "let me now ask you a question... How are you using the gifts you have been given, the 'power' which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?"

The Visit to the UK 2010

Pope Benedict visited the United Kingdom in 2010. This was the second visit of a Pope to the UK. John Paul II had visited in 1982. The visit to the UK began in Scotland. Pope Benedict arrived in Edinburgh Airport on the 16th September, the Feast of St. Ninian. After meeting the Queen and First Minister, the Pope attended a parade for St. Ninian's day in Edinburgh. Ninian was a Saint who brought Christianity to Scotland in the fifth century. Attendance was open to all, with a parade of school children and figures from Scotland's Christian history.

That afternoon, Pope Benedict said Mass at Bellahouston Park in Glasgow. During his homily at Bellahouston, the Pope addressed, in a special way, the young people of Scotland:

".....I would like to say a word to you, my dear young Catholics of Scotland. I urge you to lead lives worthy of our Lord (cf. Eph 4:1) and of yourselves. There are many temptations placed before you every day.....- drugs, money, alcohol - which the world tells you will bring you happiness, yet these things are destructive and divisive. There is only one thing which lasts: the love of Jesus Christ personally for each one of you. Search for him, know him and love him, and he will set you free from slavery to the glittering but superficial existence frequently proposed by today's society. Put aside what is worthless and learn of your own dignity as children of God".

The Resignation

Pope Benedict announced that he planned to resign as Pope on 11th February 2013. His decision to step down as made him the first pope to relinquish the office since Gregory XII in 1415. Given that popes have generally held the position from election until death, the resignation was very unexpected. Benedict stated that the reason for his decision was his declining health due to old age. Scotland's First Minister at the time, Alex Salmond, said that the world "should respect the decision of His Holiness to pass on his ministry in a selfless gesture, on health grounds, in the best interests of the Church" and reminisced "like many Scots, I remember with great fondness the resounding success of Pope Benedict's visit to Scotland in 2010 and the papal Mass celebrated at Bellahouston Park. I wish him a very peaceful retirement."

For Reflection/Discussion

World Youth Day Cologne 2005 - Pope Benedict challenged young people to take part in Sunday Mass regularly. Do you find it difficult to go to Mass? If so, why?

World Youth Day 2008 - Sydney: Pope Benedict challenged young people to think about how they use their gifts. What gifts and talents do you have? How can you use them to serve your school, your parish and your community?

The Visit to the UK 2010 - Pope Benedict challenged young Scots to put aside temptations and focus on knowing and loving God. Do you think this is a difficult thing to do? If so, why?

The Resignation - Pope Benedict was the first Pope to resign in almost 600 years. When asked later from whom he had asked advice before making this decision, he simply said 'God'. Do we ever pray before making big decisions in our lives? Would we see asking for God's guidance as important?

Pope Benedict: The Key Ideas

God is Love

How do we describe God? What can we say about Him? In Pope Benedict's opinion the most important thing we can say about God is that 'He is love' (1 John 1:48).

Pope Benedict worried that we live in a time when "the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence" (*Deus Caritas Est* 1). Pope Benedict insisted that if we understand God as 'love', we'll always respond to Him and to other people with love!

The Truth

A central theme in Benedict's writings is the idea of 'truth'. For Benedict, the modern world has a very narrow and a very restrictive idea of what 'truth' consists in. The modern world tends to think as 'truth' as a thing that can be measured or proved scientifically in a laboratory.

For Benedict, this doesn't really make sense. How can you measure 'love' or 'hope' or 'joy'? He said that 'truth' can be found in many places - history, psychology and faith - not just in science! Pope Benedict insisted that we have to have a wider idea of 'truth'.

The Liturgy

Pope Benedict was concerned that some people in the Church had lost a sense of the importance of the Liturgy, especially the Mass. For Benedict every time we go to Mass, every time we pray we're expressing what we believe. If we disrespect the Mass or don't fully participate in the Liturgy it's a sure sign that something is going wrong with our faith!

Faith in the Public Square

Pope Benedict was concerned that faith communities weren't always listened to by their governments. He worried that faith communities, especially Churches, were being pushed to the margins when it came to important national debates.

He said that governments have to see religion not as a problem to be solved but, rather, as an important contributor to society. The opinions, beliefs and attitudes of religious people are as important and valuable as those held by non-religious people. As an example of the kind of situation he was concerned about, Pope Benedict often spoke about governments and/or councils re-naming Christmas 'Winter-Fest' or 'Winterval'!

Hope

A major theme of Pope Benedict's writings is the idea of 'hope'. When we hear the word 'Hope' we probably think about tomorrow being somehow better than today - 'I hope that tomorrow the weather will be better' or 'I hope that tomorrow, I'll have more money!'

For Benedict the idea of 'hope' is a bit more complicated! Benedict believes that hope is all about accepting that God has a plan for our lives. Things don't just happen to us. There are no accidents and we're not victims of fate. God always has a plan for our lives and this plan gives us purpose and direction. For Benedict this is precisely what 'hope' is - knowing that God has a plan and a purpose for our lives.

Benedict worried that many people lacked this 'hope' and that they had forgotten or ignored God's plan for their lives.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. **God is Love:** Pope Benedict says that it comes to describing God the most important word is 'love'. Can you think of any other words you could use to describe God?
2. **The Truth:** Pope Benedict says that there is more to 'truth' we can we prove in a laboratory. Do you agree with this? If so, why?
3. **The Liturgy:** Pope Benedict insisted that the way we treat the Liturgy, especially the Mass, is a pretty sure indicator of how important our faith is us. Do you agree with this? If so, why?
4. **Faith in the Public Square:** Do you think Pope Benedict was right to claim that the views of religious people are often not tolerated or respected by wider society?
5. **Hope:** How would you describe 'hope'? What things or people give you 'hope'? Do you agree with Pope Benedict's description of 'hope'?



Extension Activities

#godiscover

Find out more about Pope Benedict's visit to the UK in 2010! You could make a poster about the visit or work with classmates on a presentation for your class.

#goprayer

Pope Benedict says the Rosary everyday. Could your class say a decade of the Rosary together? You could perhaps have a different prayer intention before each Hail Mary. If it's been a while since you said the Rosary it may be useful to remind yourself of how the prayers are recited.

#gomeet

Pope Benedict has a remarkable vocation story. Why don't you invite a priest or religious sister to come into your class and speak about their vocation?