



## BEFORE GOD...

*By Mariano Di Vito, OFM Cap.*

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Pope Benedict XVI does not leave the arena of history. When the clock struck 8:00 p.m. on 28 February, he did not end his ministry. It is only the way he practises this ministry that has changed.

The theologian pope has decided to renounce his temporal guidance of the "holy Church of God" and to continue devotedly to serve it "by a life dedicated to prayer."

These were the words he used, last 11 February, at the end of the declaration in which he made known his decision to "renounce the ministry of Bishop of Rome, Successor of Saint Peter," that had been "entrusted" to him "by the Cardinals on 19 April 2005." Words that were considered of secondary importance and relegated to the background by the turbulent media system intent on uncovering and hypothesising possible undeclared reasons behind this historic decision.

And yet the key to understanding this decision (only apparently out of weakness) and of the whole Pontificate is to be found in those words and, in particular, in that one word: "prayer."

In fact, Benedict XVI explained at once that he made this decision, "knowing full well the seriousness of this act" only "after having repeatedly examined my conscience before God," that is in prayer.

Two days later, during the general audience of Wednesday 13 February, he confirmed this still more clearly: "I have done this in full freedom for the good of the Church, after much prayer and having examined my conscience before God."

Then, commenting on the Sunday Gospel, that speaks of the temptation of Jesus in the desert, the Holy Father made a reflection that – in the context of his stepping down from the pontificate – seemed to be enlightening. "What is the essence of the three temptations to which Jesus is subjected?" the Pope asked. And he responded: "It is the proposal to exploit God, to use Him for one's own interests, for one's own glory and for one's own success. And therefore, essentially to put oneself in God's place, removing Him from one's own existence and making Him seem superfluous. Each one of us must therefore ask him- or herself: 'what place does God have in my life? Is He the Lord or am I?'" There is no doubt that Benedict XVI has taken a radical decision to put God in the first place (or perhaps more correctly: to live only of God, for God and in God), deciding to spend the last years of his life in study, meditation and prayer, in the recently renovated "former monastery of cloistered nuns on Vatican hill," as Father Federico Lombardi, the director of the Holy See's

Press Office has made known.

He has renounced his earthly power, the one and only power able to prevail over the heart of the Almighty.

Padre Pio was convinced of this truth, too: "God's power triumphs over everything," we read in his letters, "but humble and suffering prayer prevails over God Himself. It stops His hand, extinguishes His lightning, disarms Him, vanquishes and placates Him and makes Him almost a dependant and a friend" (*Letters II*).

Joseph Ratzinger has chosen to exercise solely the power of prayer. He has chosen God. He has chosen the better part that shall never be taken away from him (cf. Lk 10, 38-42).

Mindful of the devotion demonstrated by the Holy Father towards Padre Pio, in particular with his pastoral visit to San Giovanni Rotondo on 21 June 2009, and his kindness shown to us, Padre Pio's fellow friars, we wish to express our gratitude to the Lord for the great gift that the Church has received with these eight years of his Pontificate and we invoke Divine Providence to continue to accompany Benedict XVI and the whole Church in these momentous and significant times.

In his company, you can be sure, we will be many.  
Before God!