

At the final general audience of Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square "Experience of the Church, the family of God"

Comments of Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement, who with hundreds of other followers of the Movement was present for this audience.

The Pope is welcomed at CastelGandolfo by over 1300 people from Europe and beyond taking part in a convention at the nearby Mariapolis Centre.

Opinions expressed by persons from the Ecumenical sphere, the Jewish world and from ones with non-religious beliefs.

«I am really impressed by the Pope's repeated words that he is not alone and that through the embrace of communion, he feels the affectionate family ties of brothers and sisters, of sons and daughters the world over». These were the words of Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement at the end of the historical final audience of Benedict XVI. She also remarked: "I feel that the Pope's words are a strong call to live the Gospel that renews our life continuously" making it "whole, authentic, coherent" because as he emphasized "the Gospel purifies and renews".

While joining the Pope in prayers for the next Conclave, the Movement feels committed to "be close to him" and ascend on the mount *"to pray with him, with his own faith in Christ who leads the Church and with the same serene optimism he has shown us"*.

Several hundreds of followers of the Focolare Movement together its general Council were present for the final audience in St Peter's Square. They wanted to be there to thank the Pope and unite themselves with him also through the warmth of their presence. Over 1300 people from Europe together with representatives from Syria, Brazil, Korea, Malta, the Philippines and Indonesia will be waiting to greet the Pope at CastelGandolfo. They are presently taking part in a meeting for families at the nearby Mariapolis Centre.

Comments expressing support and appreciation for the decision of Benedict XVI keep on pouring in from the ecumenical world, from members of various religious beliefs and from friends of the Movement with non-religious beliefs.

Rev. Robin Smith, bishop of the Church of England said: *"I met Pope Benedict several times and I have always been impressed by his sanctity, authenticity and benevolence. The decision (...) to abdicate and retire (...) reformulates the image of the papacy, not least in the minds of Catholics"*. Dr. Callan Slipper, a clergyman of the Church of England opines that the Pope's decision defines the meaning of the Petrine ministry: *"Pray and suffer in the first place, and then also act. I think it is a good definition of what we all must do to serve others. After his resignation, he will no longer be in a position to act, however he will continue to pray and suffer for the Church"*.

Comments came also from the Jewish world. Ariel Kleiner, the Rabbi from Argentina wrote: *"Hearing the news of the Pope's resignation through Twitter, I realised that we would be entering into a doubly historic moment. I hope that there will soon be the white smoke and that the successor can continue on the interreligious paths of Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II"*.

The Croatian lawyer, Zdravko Dujmović who has no religious convictions, made a very meaningful statement. He said: *"Pope Benedict XVI has gone unblemished. You cannot not love him and not respect him even more for what he has done for contemporary Europe and for the whole of Christendom"*.

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