Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Benedict XVI and his brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, take a walk through the garden of

Pope Benedict XVI and his brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, take a walk through the garden of a house the pope owns in Pentling, near Regensburg, Germany, Sept. 13, 2006. Pope Benedict died Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican. (CNS/Michaela Rehle, Reuters)



by Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 31, 2022
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Here is a collection of notable quotes from Pope Benedict XVI from homilies, documents, messages and speeches from 2005 to 2013, the years he served as pope. They are grouped according to subject.

Abortion and the right to life

"How can it be that the most wondrous and sacred human space -- the womb -- has become a place of unutterable violence" through abortion?
—Speech, World Youth Day, Sydney, July 17, 2008

"Everyone must be helped to become aware of the intrinsic evil of the crime of abortion. In attacking human life in its very first stages, it is also an aggression against society itself. Politicians and legislators, therefore, as servants of the common good, are duty bound to defend the fundamental right to life, the fruit of God's love."

—Meeting with the presidents of Latin American episcopal commissions for family and life, Dec. 3, 2005

"The fundamental human right, the presupposition of every other right, is the right to life itself. This is true of life from the moment of conception until its natural end. Abortion, consequently, cannot be a human right -– it is the very opposite."
—Speech in Austria, Sept. 7, 2007

Abuse

"It is your God-given responsibility as pastors to bind up the wounds caused by every breach of trust, to foster healing, to promote reconciliation and to reach out with loving concern to those so seriously wronged."
—Meeting with U.S. bishops, April 16, 2008

"To the victims of abuse and their families: You have suffered grievously, and I am truly sorry. I know that nothing can undo the wrong you have endured. Your trust has been betrayed and your dignity has been violated. Many of you found that, when you were courageous enough to speak of what happened to you, no one would listen. In her name, I openly express the shame and remorse that we all feel."
—Letter to Catholics of Ireland, March 2010

Auschwitz

"To speak in this place of horror, in this place where unprecedented mass crimes were committed against God and man, is almost impossible -- and it is particularly difficult and troubling for a Christian, for a pope from Germany. In a place like this, words fail; in the end, there can only be a dread silence -- a silence which is itself a heartfelt cry to God: Why, Lord, did you remain silent? How could you tolerate all this? In silence, then, we bow our heads before the endless line of those who suffered and were put to death here; yet our silence becomes in turn a plea for forgiveness and reconciliation, a plea to the living God never to let this happen again."
—Visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, May 28, 2006

Confession and forgiveness:

"It is very helpful to confess with a certain regularity. It is true: our sins are always the same, but we clean our homes, our rooms, at least once a week, even if the dirt is always the same, in order to live in cleanliness, in order to start again. Otherwise, the dirt might not be seen, but it builds up. Something similar can be said about the soul."
—Response to children's questions, Oct. 15, 2005

"By letting myself be forgiven, I learn to forgive others. In recognizing my own weakness, I grow more tolerant and understanding of the failings of my neighbor."
—Letter to seminarians, Oct. 18, 2010

Death and eternity

Eternal life will be like "immersing yourself in the ocean of infinite love where time -- a before and an after -- no longer exists. Fullness of life and joy: This is what we hope for and expect from our being with Christ."
—Angelus address Nov. 2, 2008

Economy

"I would like to remind everyone, especially governments engaged in boosting the world's economic and social assets, that the primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity."
—Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009

"Economy and finance, as instruments, can be used badly when those at the helm are motivated by purely selfish ends. Instruments that are good in themselves can thereby be transformed into harmful ones. But it is man's darkened reason that produces these consequences, not the instrument per se. Therefore, it is not the instrument that must be called to account, but individuals, their moral conscience and their personal and social responsibility."
—Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009

"If globalization in technology and economy is not accompanied by a new opening of the conscience to God, before whom all of us have a responsibility, then there will be a catastrophe. This is the great responsibility which weighs today on Christians."
—Speech in Benevento, Italy, June 2, 2002

Environment and creation

"The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility toward the poor, toward future generations and toward humanity as a whole."
—Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009

"In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation. If this vision is lost, we end up either considering nature an untouchable taboo or, on the contrary, abusing it. Neither attitude is consonant with the Christian vision of nature as the fruit of God's creation."
—Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009

Evangelization

"The Gospel must be preached and taught as an integral way of life, offering an attractive and true answer, intellectually and practically, to real human problems."
—Meeting with U.S. bishops, April 16, 2008

"What is needed above all, at this time in the history of the church in America, is a renewal of that apostolic zeal which inspires her shepherds actively to seek out the lost, to bind up those who have been wounded, and to bring strength to those who are languishing. And this, as I have said, calls for new ways of thinking based on a sound diagnosis of today's challenges and a commitment to unity in the service of the church's mission to the present generation."
—Meeting with U.S. bishops, April 16, 2008

Family and marriage

"The good that the church and society as a whole expect from marriage and from the family founded upon marriage is so great as to call for full pastoral commitment to this particular area. Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself."
—Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Feb. 22, 2007

"Dear married couples, in living out your marriage you are not giving each other any particular thing or activity, but your whole lives. And your love is fruitful first and foremost for yourselves, because you desire and accomplish one another's good, you experience the joy of receiving and giving. It is also fruitful in your generous and responsible procreation of children, in your attentive care for them, and in their vigilant and wise education. And lastly, it is fruitful for society, because family life is the first and irreplaceable school of social virtues, such as respect for persons, gratuitousness, trust, responsibility, solidarity, cooperation."
—World Meeting of Families, Milan, Italy, June 3, 2012

Faith

"Faith is not an illusion, a flight of fancy, a refuge or sentimentalism; rather it is total involvement in the whole of life and is the proclamation of the Gospel, the Good News that can set the whole of the person free."
—General audience, Nov. 14, 2012

"Many people today have a limited idea of the Christian faith, because they identify it with a mere system of beliefs and values rather than with the truth of a God who revealed himself in history, anxious to communicate with human beings in a tete-a-tete, in a relationship of love with them."
—General audience, Nov. 14, 2012

Faith and reason:

"The God in whom we believe is a God of reason — a reason, to be sure, which is not a kind of cold mathematics of the universe but is one with love and with goodness.

We make our prayer to God, and we appeal to humanity, that this reason -- the logic of love and the recognition of the power of reconciliation and peace -- may prevail over the threats arising from irrationalism or from a spurious and godless reason."
—Speech, May 28, 2006

"Secularism and fundamentalism exclude the possibility of fruitful dialogue and effective cooperation between reason and religious faith. Reason always stands in need of being purified by faith: This also holds true for political reason, which must not consider itself omnipotent. For its part, religion always needs to be purified by reason in order to show its authentically human face."
—Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009

"Reason and faith can come to each other's assistance. Only together will they save man. Entranced by an exclusive reliance on technology, reason without faith is doomed to flounder in an illusion of its own omnipotence. Faith without reason risks being cut off from everyday life."
—Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009

Pope Benedict XVI lectures on faith and reason at the University of Regensburg in Germany ir

Pope Benedict XVI lectures on faith and reason at the University of Regensburg in Germany in this Sept. 12, 2006, file photo. A quotation from a Byzantine emperor that the pope used in this talk provoked outrage in the Muslim world, but the incident later led to increased dialogue with Muslims. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Freedom

"The person who abandons himself totally in God's hands does not become God's puppet, a boring 'yes man'; he does not lose his freedom. Only the person who entrusts himself totally to God finds true freedom, the great, creative immensity of the freedom of good."
—Homily, Dec. 8, 2005

"The closer a person is to God, the closer he is to people."
—Homily, Dec. 8, 2005

Fundamentalism

"Fanaticism, fundamentalism and practices contrary to human dignity can never be justified, even less so in the name of religion. The profession of a religion cannot be exploited or imposed by force."
—World Peace Day message 2011

"Religious fundamentalism and secularism are alike in that both represent extreme forms of a rejection of legitimate pluralism and the principle of secularity. ... A society that would violently impose or, on the contrary, reject religion is not only unjust to individuals and to God, but also to itself."
—World Peace Day message 2011

Joy and hope

"Know that God will never abandon you. Turn your eyes to him often. He gave his life for you on the cross because he loves you. Contemplation of this great love brings a hope and joy to our hearts that nothing can destroy. Christians can never be sad, for they have met Christ, who gave his life for them."
—World Youth Day message 2012

"God is the foundation of hope: not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; his kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us."
—Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, Nov. 20, 2007

Liturgy

"Certainly, the beauty of our celebrations can never be sufficiently cultivated, fostered and refined, for nothing can be too beautiful for God, who is himself infinite beauty."
—Homily in Paris, Sept. 12, 2008

"Our earthly liturgies will never be more than a pale reflection of the liturgy celebrated in the Jerusalem on high, the goal of our pilgrimage on earth. May our own celebrations nonetheless resemble that liturgy as closely as possible and grant us a foretaste of it!"

—Homily in Paris, Sept. 12, 2008

"The liturgy is not the memory of past events but is the living presence of the paschal mystery of Christ, who transcends and unites times and places. ... The conviction must grow within us every day that the liturgy is not our or my 'doing' but rather is an action of God in us and with us."
—General audience, Oct. 3, 2012

Music

"I hope that the harmony of song and music, which knows no social or religious barriers, represents a constant invitation to believers and all people of goodwill to look together for the universal language of love that enables people to build a world based on justice and solidarity, hope and peace."
—Remarks to German orchestra and choirs, Oct. 20, 2005

"Music, like art, can be a particularly great way to proclaim Christ, because it is able to eloquently render more perceptible the mystery" of the faith.
—Remarks to Irish choir and orchestra, Feb. 12, 2009

There is "a mysterious and deep kinship between music and hope, between song and eternal life."
—Remarks after concert, April 24, 2008

Media and communication:

"There exists a Christian way of being present in the digital world: This takes the form of a communication which is honest and open, responsible and respectful of others. To proclaim the Gospel through the new media means not only to insert expressly religious content into different media platforms, but also to witness consistently, in one's own digital profile and in the way one communicates choices, preferences and judgments that are fully consistent with the Gospel."
—World Communications Day message 2011

Mary

"Mary is so interwoven in the great mystery of the church that she and the church are inseparable, just as she and Christ are inseparable. Mary mirrors the church, anticipates the church in her person, and in all the turbulence that affects the suffering, struggling church she always remains the star of salvation. In her lies the true center in which we trust, even if its peripheries very often weigh on our soul."
—Homily, Dec. 8, 2005

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, gives a lecture in New York in Januar

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI, gives a lecture in New York in January 1988. Pope Benedict died Dec. 31, 2022, at the age of 95 in his residence at the Vatican. (CNS/KNA)

Relativism

"Having a clear faith based on the Creed of the church is often labeled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be 'tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine,' seems the only attitude that can cope with modern times. We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one's own ego and desires."
—Homily, April 18, 2005

"The illusion that moral relativism provides the key for peaceful coexistence is actually the origin of divisions and the denial of the dignity of human beings."
—World Peace Day message 2011

Religious freedom

"It is inconceivable, then, that believers should have to suppress a part of themselves — their faith — in order to be active citizens. It should never be necessary to deny God in order to enjoy one's rights. ... The full guarantee of religious liberty cannot be limited to the free exercise of worship but has to give due consideration to the public dimension of religion, and hence to the possibility of

believers playing their part in building the social order."
—Speech at the United Nations, April 18, 2008

"Religious freedom is not the exclusive patrimony of believers, but of the whole family of the earth's peoples. It is an essential element of a constitutional state; it cannot be denied without at the same time encroaching on all fundamental rights and freedoms, since it is their synthesis and keystone."
—World Peace Day message 2011

Salvation

"The Lord God did not counter the threats of history with external power, as we human beings would expect according to the prospects of our world. His weapon is goodness. He revealed himself as a child, born in a stable. This is precisely how he counters with his power, completely different from the destructive powers of violence. In this very way he saves us. In this very way he shows us what saves."
—Speech, Dec. 22, 2005

Sin

"The human being does not trust God. Tempted by the serpent, he harbors the suspicion that in the end, God takes something away from his life, that God is a rival who curtails our freedom and that we will be fully human only when we have cast him aside; in brief, that only in this way can we fully achieve our freedom."
—Homily, Dec. 8, 2005

"We have a lurking suspicion that a person who does not sin must really be basically boring and that something is missing from his life."
—Homily, Dec. 8, 2005

Service and charity

"Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave."

—*Encyclical Deus Caritas Est*, 2005

"If in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be 'devout' and to perform my 'religious duties,' then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely 'proper,' but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbor can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me."
—Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005

"The church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the sacraments and the Word."
—Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 2005

Truth

"Relativism, by indiscriminately giving value to practically everything, has made 'experience' all-important. Yet, experiences, detached from any consideration of what is good or true, can lead, not to genuine freedom, but to moral or intellectual confusion, to a lowering of standards, to a loss of self-respect, and even to despair."
—Speech, World Youth Day, Sydney, July 17, 2008

"Life is not just a succession of events or experiences, helpful though many of them are. It is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful. It is to this end that we make our choices; it is for this that we exercise our freedom; it is in this –- in truth, in goodness, and in beauty -– that we find happiness and joy."
—Speech, World Youth Day, Sydney, July 17, 2008

"Let us never forget St. Augustine's experience: It is not we who possess the truth after having sought it, but the truth that seeks us out and possesses us."
—General audience, Nov. 14, 2012

"Truth and love coincide in Christ. To the extent that we draw close to Christ, in our own lives too, truth and love are blended. Love without truth would be blind; truth without love would be like 'a clanging cymbal.'"
—Homily at opening of conclave that elected him, April 18, 2005

Theology

"We have to ask questions. Those who do not ask do not get a reply. But I would add that for theology, in addition to the courage to ask, we also need the humility to listen to the answers that the Christian faith gives us; the humility to perceive in these answers their reasonableness and thus to make them newly accessible to our time and to ourselves."
—Speech, March 21, 2007

Vatican II

"The Second Vatican Council documents, to which we must return, freeing them from a mass of publications which instead of making them known have often concealed them, are a compass in our time, too, that permits the barque of the church to put out into the deep in the midst of storms or on calm and peaceful waves, to sail safely and to reach her destination."
—General audience, Oct. 10, 2012

"There is an interpretation that I would call 'a hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture'; it has frequently availed itself of the sympathies of the mass media and also one trend of modern theology. On the other, there is the 'hermeneutic of reform,' of renewal in the continuity of the one subject-church which the Lord has given to us. She is a subject which increases in time and develops, yet always remaining the same, the one subject of the journeying people of God."
—Speech, Dec. 22, 2005

"The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar church and the post-conciliar church. It asserts that the texts of the council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the council. It claims that they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things that are now pointless. However, the true spirit of the council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts."
—Speech, Dec. 22, 2005

"The church, both before and after the council, was and is the same church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, journeying on through time."
—Speech, Dec. 22, 2005

Vocations

"God is alive, and he needs people to serve him and bring him to others. It does makes sense to become a priest: the world needs priests, pastors, today, tomorrow and always, until the end of time."
—Letter to seminarians, Oct. 18, 2010

This story appears in the **The Ratzinger/Benedict XVI legacy** feature series. View the full series.