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Surprise, surprise!

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NCR Today

Benedict Resigns

A few months ago, Vatican reporter John Allen gave a presentation to fellow *NCR* staff and contributors about his current predictions for the next pope. I should have taken better notes.

I found out about the pope's resignation announcement this morning the way I find out about most major, breaking news -- from my sister, who gets up way earlier than I do. She texted me a simple sentence, which was quickly confirmed by a scan of my Facebook feed.

My first reaction was not only surprise but shock. Not only is the resignation of a pope a once-in-500+ years kind of thing, but I really didn't expect it from a good German like Ratzinger. We are known more for our stick-to-itiveness and tenacity, not our ability to let go of control.

Yet I find it somewhat refreshing in a world where everything is scripted that even the pope's closest aides were surprised by the announcement. Bryan Cones over at U.S. Catholic's blog is "shocked that anyone is shocked" since Pope Benedict has spoken publicly about the possibility of a papal resignation. Still, we didn't think he meant *him*.

In the few hours since the announcement went public, the storyline has gone from "Something's fishy" to "Good for him for doing what's best for the church" to "How's this actually going to work?" Time will tell. Meanwhile, I'm still reveling in the ability of the world to be surprised. Probably not a bad lesson as we move into Lent.

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