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Francis meets Benedict: 'We're brothers'

by Thomas C. Fox

NCR Today

Pope Francis met his predecessor, Benedict XVI, Saturday in the first meeting of two popes in more than 600 years.

Vatican news reported the two men embraced on the heliport at Castel Gandolfo, where Francis landed. In the chapel where they prayed together, Benedict offered Francis the traditional kneeler used by the pope. Francis refused to take it alone, saying, "We're brothers," and the two prayed together on the kneeler.

The Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, said he understood Benedict offered his pledge of obedience to the new pope, while Francis thanked Benedict for his ministry. He said they both wore white, though Benedict was in a simple cassock without the traditional sash and cape worn by Francis.

Lombardi described the beautiful embrace that the men shared before making their way to the Apostolic Palace.

The Holy Father also brought a gift for his predecessor, an icon of Our Lady of Humility, as a gift for Benedict XVI's great humility. The two men then spent an estimated 45 minutes in private conversation in the Library before emerging to lunch with two secretaries.

Further underlying the deep communion between these two men, Lombardi reminded journalists that since his election to the papacy, Francis has twice telephoned the pope emeritus and warmly referred to him in all of his public speeches.

Benedict XVI also accompanied Pope Francis to the heliport of the papal summer residence Saturday afternoon on his return to Vatican City State.

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