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# Supreme Knight Patrick Kelly pays tribute to Benedict XVI's legacy

*Among the many groups of Catholic faithful present at the Requiem Mass for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, many members of the Knights of Columbus came to Rome. Patrick Kelly, Supreme Knight, shared with Vatican News his experience of the event, his memories of Benedict XVI, and the Knights' almost half century of sponsoring the Vatican's global media broadcasts.*

By Thaddeus Jones



Recalling his own experience of the solemn Requiem Mass for Benedict XVI on Thursday, **Patrick E. Kelly**, Supreme Knight of the **Knights of Columbus** shared with Vatican News his memories of the Pope Benedict and the legacy he leaves the Church.

Mr. Kelly is the 14th Supreme Knight and serves as the chief executive officer and chairman of the board of the organization established in 1882 by Father (now Blessed) Michael J. McGivney, who served as the assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in the US east coast city of New Haven, Connecticut.

**Blessed Michael McGivney** founded the Knights of Columbus with a group of parishioners, basing its mission on the principles of charity, unity and fraternity. The Knights grew quickly in number and today consist of two million members internationally making it the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization. The members offer a wide range of outreach, including service and support to the sick, to those with physical disabilities, the needy and their families.

The Knights of Columbus have also extensively supported the Vatican's own media outreach in an extraordinary way since 1974, the eve of the Holy Year 1975, when they covered the satellite and broadcast costs of the global telecast of the opening of the Holy Door and Christmas Midnight Mass presided over by Pope St. Paul VI in Saint Peter's Basilica. Forty three countries broadcast live the celebration, including 29 outside Europe, a technological feat for the time.

Since 1974, the Knights of Columbus have continued their generous support of funding the global distribution and broadcast costs of all the major papal celebrations and Vatican events, including, seasonal Christmas and Easter celebrations, Jubilees, papal funerals and conclaves, just to name a few.

The global broadcasts have provided people around the world, including many who are not Catholic, a source of inspiration and consolation, a reminder of the true purpose of life.

#### **Radio interview with Supreme Knight, Patrick E. Kelly, Knights of Columbus**

**The Requiem Mass here for Pope Emeritus Benedict the 16th. How would you describe this moment, this participation yourself?**

It was a really solemn moment, and I think there was a tremendous outpouring of love for the person of Benedict XVI. I think everyone thinks of him as a man of great service to the Church, a man who put all of the gifts that God gave him - his intellect, his will, his kindness, his virtue - he put all of that at service to the Church for so many years. There were so many people here, tens of thousands coming here streaming by his body to pay their last respects to him. And I think it was a recognition of just who he was, the strength of mind and the strength of character. I actually think it was a time that we can be very proud of being Catholics because the Church raises up men like this, men of tremendous ability. And then they take that ability and they put it at the service of the Church. So, I think it's a moment of

unity. We saw that this morning at the Requiem Mass. So many world leaders were there. So many people were there paying their final respects to Benedict. A moment of unity, but also a moment, I think, of pride in the Church.

**Do you have any particular memory of Benedict XVI that you'd like to share?**

Over the years, I had the opportunity to meet Cardinal Ratzinger when he was prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. And I always found him to be just a very kind man, very considerate. He had a good sense of humor, too. So that was always a joy. And I always admired him. And I knew some of the priests who worked for him, and they told me what an incredible experience it was to work for then-Cardinal Ratzinger. But then after he became pope, the Knights of Columbus and the John Paul II Institute sponsored a special conference on a response to post-abortion trauma and divorce. The conference was called "Oil on the Wounds." So, we had a conference here in Rome. And then after the conference, we had an opportunity to meet with him and to talk a little bit about that. And again, his pastoral care for people who had suffered from abortion and from divorce, I think was just a testament to the love that he had. And I think that's an important aspect to Pope Benedict to consider, that, yes, he was he was a brilliant thinker and writer, but he also was a man of deep love. And two of his encyclicals have love in the title.

For the Knights of Columbus, he's very special because his encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* really is a wonderful treatise on the virtue of charity. And of course, for the Knights of Columbus, charity is our first principle. And what Pope Benedict did in that encyclical, he really linked charity to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And he says that being a Christian is not the result of an ethical decision or an attachment to a high ideal. It really is an encounter with a person – the person of Jesus Christ. And that, he says in the encyclical, is what changes your heart. That is what gives you what he says is a heart that sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. So, I think Pope Benedict was such a wonderful teacher and guide for us.

**Do you think that would be one of his lasting legacies, as people look back and have the time now to focus and reflect more deeply on his legacy?**

Yes, I think it will. I think when you look at Pope Benedict, you really see that legacy of love. I think in his writings, you really get the sense that, yes, he was an intellectual, he was a man of the Church. But it was a relationship with the love of Christ that really motivated him. And I think in *Caritas in Veritate*, (*charity in truth*) I think those two things were really what Pope Benedict espoused in so many ways. So, I think for these days here in Rome, yes, they are solemn days where we're saying goodbye to a man of the Church. But I think in so many ways, in my heart and I think in many others, they're days of gratitude. Gratitude that the Church had this wonderful man who put all his gifts, the gifts that God had given him, at the service of the Church. And so, I think there's a tremendous gratitude. And that's why so many thousands of people were here today for the funeral.

And many, many more were connected by satellite, by television, thanks to the Knights of Columbus since 1974. As you well know, the Knights have helped subsidize and assist the Holy See in its communication outreach, with the broadcasting of these big events and also the seasonal telecasts at Christmas and Easter. How would you describe that service and charity that you're also providing not only to the Pope, the Holy See, but also to the entire world?

It really is a privilege to be able to do that, that we have been able to cooperate with the Holy See and with the popes over the years, going back almost 50 years now to the mid-1970s. For us, it really is the Knights, as knights we are in service to the Church, to Jesus Christ and his Church. So, in a way it's a service that the Knights can do for the Church. It really is a means of evangelization for people all over the world to watch these very important broadcasts coming from the Vatican. And I think it's important because it connects people. It connects the individual Catholic, wherever he or she is, to the wider Church, to the universal Church. And I think that's very important. It's been very important in my life. As a young boy, we would watch the broadcasts from the Vatican on Christmas Eve. Little did I know then that the Knights of Columbus was behind it. It really made us feel connected to the pope and to the Church by watching those broadcasts on television, on NBC, on Christmas Eve. I think that's really, really important to have that sense of the universality of the Church – that we're a family and to be able to be connected to the pope and to see these solemn liturgies and these important moments of the Church. Just like the moment today. Yes, there were tens of thousands of people in Saint Peter's Square, but there were more watching it, more people watching it on television and really being connected. So, it's something the Knights of Columbus can do that we're really proud to do and proud to cooperate with the Vatican on.

**We can easily say billions of people have been reached over almost 50 years, and not only Catholics, but non-Catholics, nonbelievers. Would you say that's also an important role that the Knights are happy to have supported?**

Yes, I think in that aspect, it's really an evangelization, right? It's a way to reach people with the Gospel. And as you say, over the years, billions of people have watched and you never know where someone is, but these broadcasts can touch people and it really can evangelize them. And it can strengthen the faith of believers. It might be the spark that starts the faith in non-believers. And I think that's very important, mass communications. I know that the Vatican sees this and the Knights of Columbus also see that it's a means, a tool of evangelization.

**Also, would you say it underscores universal fraternity, Pope Francis often uses that term, because at times there are moments that the world is focusing on, not necessarily a local church event, but maybe a global event. When we look at the COVID pandemic and the special Vatican global broadcast with the images of Pope Francis in the square on his own, in a sense of bringing everyone together, in recognizing our common humanity and our common vulnerability as well?**

I think that's exactly right. And that's what this kind of communication can do. You raise a perfect example that really was just such a symbolic view of the COVID pandemic to have the Successor of Peter in St Peter's Square alone in that very desperate time the world was going through. But it focused the world's attention. And I think it gave the world encouragement. It gave so many people who were suffering from the pandemic, it gave them encouragement and to send the message - I think this was what the Holy Father was doing - you are not alone. The Lord is with you in this suffering.

**And also, I remember very well the year 2000. The Knights subsidized all the broadcasts of these events that really drew people together, even the World Youth Days.**

For instance, the World Youth Day is so important. I mean, so many people say that their lives were changed at World Youth Day. There are so many vocations to the priesthood and religious life and to marriage that were really enkindled through World Youth Day. And of course, not everyone can go to World Youth Day, just like not everyone can come to Rome for a consistory or for a conclave or for a liturgy. But you can watch it on television, and that's very, very important. I know many people, for instance, today, many people in the United States were up very early at 3:00 in the morning to watch the funeral of Pope Benedict.

**Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

One of the things I've been reflecting on regarding Pope Benedict - and I think this is an example that we can all emulate - Pope Benedict, particularly in his decision to resign the papacy, it took great courage to do that. But it also took great freedom to do that. And I think it was an interior freedom that he had because of his prayer life and because of his relationship with Jesus Christ, because only Christ can give you that kind of freedom to make a decision of that magnitude. And from what I've read, he said he did it in perfect freedom. And he just decided that this was the best thing for the Church. So, I reflect upon that. And I think that's something that we can all think about. And maybe in our own personal and our spiritual lives try to reflect on.

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