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Happy Birthday, Pope Benedict

A message from Bishop Javier Echevarría on the 80th birthday of Pope Benedict XVI. The Prelate thanks the Holy Father for "helping us to appreciate the beauty of the Christian life."

04/16/2007

The birthday of the Holy Father recalls the white smoke from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel on April 19, 2005, white smoke that announced not only an election, but also a sacrifice. It was the sign of

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's willing acceptance of the burden of being the successor of St. Peter, at a time when he was looking forward to a well-merited rest after long years of intense work in the Lord's vineyard.

God gives the Holy Father a universal paternity. To be the Roman Pontiff means to become the father of a multitude of sons and daughters, who have to be guided and cared for in their many needs, and whom he must love in all circumstances.

On an anniversary one's thoughts usually go to the past, but it is also a time to consider the present and the future. It is a time to imagine all the savory fruits which the tree of the Church will produce through the generosity of Benedict XVI's dedication. He is a man who has embraced the task entrusted to him as Christ embraced the Cross. And he

has done so uniting intellect and humility, kindness and strength.

On the 80th birthday of the Holy Father, we feel the desire to thank him for helping us to appreciate the beauty of the Christian life, and for reminding us of the joy and the freedom of being faithful to the divine precepts. We also thank him for encouraging us to place charity at the center of our actions.

At the Mass inaugurating his pontificate, Benedict XVI asked Catholics for the help of their prayers. A year later he remarked: "I feel more and more that alone I could not carry out this task, this mission. But I also feel that I am in a great communion and together we can go ahead with the Lord's mission. . . . I offer very warm thanks to all those who in various ways support me from close at hand or follow me from afar in spirit with

their affection and their prayers. I ask each one to continue to support me, praying to God to grant that I may be a gentle and firm Pastor of his Church."

This anniversary calls us to pray and offer sacrifices for the Pope and his intentions, so that he will feel the communion of the whole Church in his effort to carry forward the mission which our Lord entrusted to all of us.

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