

Dear Teens,

Today sure is full of surprises! A snow day with no snow, and an announcement of historic proportions. I'm sure by now you've heard that effective February 28, Pope Benedict has abdicated the papacy and the Church will begin the process of selecting a new Pope.

This is difficult news for many of us. It's OK to be sad, confused and even hurt by this news. I sure am. We love Pope Benedict! But there is this: I have to trust and believe with all my heart that Pope Benedict is a man of prayer. Deeper prayer than I've experienced. And he's been given the charism to govern the Church with wisdom. If Pope Benedict has discerned that the Lord is calling him to step away from this role, then I trust that Jesus is a pretty smart guy, and that he'll continue to provide excellent leadership for our Church. And I trust that Pope Benedict has truly discerned God's will; we should have faith in that.

Reactions to this news have already been all over the place. We can expect to have Pope Benedict vilified for daring to step down, Pope Benedict hailed as courageous to take such a bold act, we can expect the media to have a field day with this (and get half the facts wrong), and we can expect some people to futilely hope that we'll get a pope who will change the Church's teachings on contraception, women's ordination and gay "marriage" (which won't happen). There will also be those who will compare Pope Benedict's abdication with Bl. John Paul II remaining in office until his last breath – some to point out Blessed John Paul's heroism, and others to say that he should have done what Pope Benedict is doing. And there will be others that go crazy with conspiracy theories.

There will also be a lot of confusion for what this means for the Church and for the future of Pope Benedict (or Cardinal Ratzinger again?). See, this hasn't happened in about 600 years. The last Pope to resign was Pope Gregory XII in 1415. For a little perspective, that's before the Protestant Reformation...it was well before Martin Luther was even born! And it was under entirely different circumstances – there was an Anti-Pope in Avignon (France), and the deal was if they both abdicated, the Cardinals could elect someone new to end the schism. There are only a very few Popes in history who have abdicated. If you want to learn more about it, check out the article in the Catholic Encyclopedia at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01031a.htm>.

What should *our* response be? First of all, we need to stay positive. We are called to be witnesses to the love and fidelity of Christ in the world; giving in despair, frustration or sadness...or even paying attention to wild rumors of conspiracy or slander against the Pope won't be helpful to you or anyone. What we must be is a people of hope, filled with trust that the Spirit will guide and protect us, and that He's got great things in store for us. We are the Church – the Bride of Christ, and Jesus loves us and provides for us better than we know.

Finally, pray for Pope Benedict. It cannot be easy for him, and it takes great humility to follow the Lord on this path. Pray for our next Pope. And pray for the cardinals who will elect him. **I would like to ask you to join me in praying at least a Hail Mary every day for each of these three**

intentions: for Pope Benedict, for the future Pope and for the Cardinal Electors. At the minimum, that's three Hail Mary's a day...probably about a minute added to your prayer life. Our prayer is powerful – and it's about all we can do to help. This is our Church, our Home. She's worth it, isn't she?

I'll be posting more on this throughout the day, and the coming weeks, on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ctklifeteen. The Core Team and I are all available if you'd like to talk about this or if you have any questions. Feel free to email me and we can talk, or I can put you in touch with anyone on the Core Team.

God Bless,

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