

A word of greeting from Benedict XVI, Pope Emeritus, on the occasion of the funeral Mass of Cardinal Joachim Meisner, on 15th July 2017



In this hour, when the Church of Cologne and believers further afield take their leave of Cardinal Joachim Meissner, I am with them in my heart and thoughts and am pleased to accede to Cardinal Woelki's wish and address a word of reflection to them.

When I heard last Wednesday by telephone of the death of Cardinal Meissner, I could not believe it at first. We had spoken to each other the previous day. From the way he spoke he was grateful to be on holiday now, after he had taken part the Sunday before (25th June) in the beatification of Bishop Teofilus Maturlionis in Vilnius. His love for the neighbouring Churches in the East, which had suffered persecution under Communism, as well as gratitude for endurance in suffering during that time left a lifelong mark on him. So it was certainly no accident that the last visit of his life was made to a confessor of the faith.

What struck me particularly in the last conversations with the Cardinal, now gone home, was the natural cheerfulness, the inner peace and the assurance he had found. We know that it was hard for him, the passionate shepherd and pastor of souls, to leave his office, and this precisely at a time when the Church had a pressing need for shepherds who would oppose the dictatorship of the zeitgeist, fully resolved to act and think from a faith standpoint. Yet I have been all the more impressed that in this last period of his life he learned to let go, and live increasingly from the conviction that the Lord does not leave his Church, even if at times the ship is almost filled to the point of shipwreck.

There were two things which in this final period allowed him to be increasingly happy and assured:

- The first was that he often related to me that what filled him with deep joy was to experience, in the Sacrament of Penance, how young people, above all young men,

came to experience the mercy of forgiveness, the gift, in effect to have found life, which only God can give them.

- The second, which again and again touched and made him happy, was the perceptible increase in Eucharistic adoration. This was the central theme for him at World Youth Day in Cologne – that there was adoration, a silence, in which the Lord alone speaks to hearts. Some pastoral and liturgical authorities were of the opinion that such a silence in contemplation of the Lord with such a huge number of people could achieve nothing. A few were also of the opinion that Eucharistic adoration as such has been overtaken, because the Lord wanted to be received in the Eucharistic bread and not be looked at. Yet the fact that a person cannot eat this bread as just some sort of nourishment, and that to “receive” the Lord in the Eucharistic Sacrament includes all the dimensions of our existence – that receiving has to be worship, something which has in the meantime become increasingly clearer. So the period of Eucharistic adoration at the Cologne World Youth Day became an interior event that has remained unforgettable, and not only to the Cardinal. This moment for him was subsequently always present internally and a great light for him.

When on the last morning Cardinal Meissner did not appear for Mass, he was found dead in his room. The breviary had slipped from his hands: he died while praying, his face on the Lord, in conversation with the Lord. The art of dying, which was given to him, again demonstrated how he had lived: with his face towards the Lord and in conversation with him. So we may confidently entrust his soul to the goodness of God. Lord, we thank you for the witness of this your servant, Joachim. Let him now intercede for the Church of Cologne and for the whole world! May he rest in peace!

(Translated by Rt Rev Michael G Campbell OSA, Bishop of Lancaster, UK)