



+Benedict XVI – A gentle pastor, humble and caring

Testimonial of Frank Arékion, Deacon, Archdiocese of Montreal

I was ordained a permanent deacon in 1994 in the Archdiocese of Montreal and am still incardinated in this Archdiocese, although I currently have a mandate to practise my diaconal ministry in the Archdiocese of Gatineau and the Archdiocese of Ottawa, since my wife and I retired and moved to Gatineau three years ago.

At the time when I met Pope Benedict XVI, I was a member of His Excellency Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte's Pastoral Council. It was he who made the request to the Vatican for my wife and myself to be received in the 'prima fila.'

It was November, 2008. Within the next few months, Suzanne and I would be celebrating 25 years of marriage and 15 years since my ordination to the permanent diaconate. Like all deacons, I had certain functions outside my professional work and my regular ministry: in my case, at the Archdiocese of Montreal. Cardinal Turcotte got wind of our wish to meet the Pope and wrote to Rome. Contrary to any reasonable expectation, we had the immense joy of being invited.

And so, at 10:30 on the morning of Wednesday, November the 12th, 2008, we stood in Saint Peter's Square in Rome, in the 'prima fila' section. It was cold. But despite the penetrating damp, the drizzling rain and the lengthy customary protocol, the Pope's radiant calm and his serene smile did not waver. Following his Wednesday address, he slowly approached the 'prima fila,' with kindly interest attending to each guest.

When he came to us, we kissed the papal ring one after the other, and then we told him we were from Canada, from Quebec, and that we were in Rome to celebrate our 25th wedding anniversary and my 15 years of ordination as a deacon. He answered quietly in impeccable French and with an expression of pleasant surprise, "You are a deacon?" We had another few moments of friendly conversation in perfect simplicity...Throughout this time, my rosary was pressed between his hand and mine. Then he blessed us and moved on to the next guest.

Pope Benedict XVI gives to each person whom he meets his complete attention, his gentle smile and his peace.

The memory that we have of him is definitely that of a holy man, one who radiates the Peace of God and passes it on in kindness, humility and simplicity. He is a gentle pastor, humble and caring.

Frank Arékion, Deacon

Suzanne Guertin Arékion, Diaconal Wife