

Pope says farewell to Alpine villages, heads to papal summer villa

LORENZAGO DI CADORE, Italy - Pope Benedict XVI left the Italian Alps July 27, flying to Rome and then driving to the papal summer villa at Castel Gandolfo.

On the eve of his departure from Lorenzago di Cadore, the pope met with the mayors of the 22 small towns in the region and with the police and forest rangers, who assured his safety and privacy since he arrived July 9.

"I can only say, with all my heart, thanks to each and every one of you for your service and commitment," the pope told the group gathered on the lawn in front of the house where he had been staying.

"Your silent, discreet and competent presence day and night gave me the space needed for an unforgettable period of rest, rest for the body and the soul," he said.

"Here we are surrounded by divine goodness visible in the beauty of the mountains," the pope told them. "But during this whole time, I also was surrounded by the human goodness, your goodness."

"For me, you really were like guardian angels, invisible, silent, but always present and available," Pope Benedict said.

Just before leaving the Alps, Pope Benedict's private secretary, Monsignor Georg Ganswein, gave an interview to the Italian newspaper Il Giornale.

The secretary spoke mainly about the pope's vacation, where each day "is well structured," beginning with Mass, the Divine Office, meditation and breakfast, followed by reading and writing, working both on the second volume of his book about Jesus and on a new encyclical.

After lunch and a brief walk near the house, the pope rests, then "returns to his

books, manuscripts, study, prayer and the piano,” Monsignor Ganswein told the paper. The pope brought with him sheet music of compositions by “Mozart, Chopin, Schubert and others. It’s not a pontifical secret that he prefers Mozart.”

About 6 p.m. each day, the pope, his secretary and the security guards would leave by car for a walk in the woods, usually along a path to a mountain chapel or shrine.

Almost every day, he said, the little papal entourage would run into a few other people out enjoying a walk.

“The children are the most courageous. The adults, surprised by the unexpected encounter, are fairly timid, they don’t know what to say,” he said. “The Holy Father always says something to break the ice.”

The children, he said, would hurry to collect a bouquet of wild flowers for the pope, but some even offered “mushrooms and blueberries or raspberries to demonstrate their affection and gratitude.”

After the walk, he said, dinner was served at 7:30 p.m., and then they would watch the evening news on television. After another stroll outside, the pope would retire for the night.

The reporter also asked Monsignor Ganswein about reaction to Pope Benedict’s July 7 document granting wider use of the Tridentine Mass. The Tridentine Mass is the Latin-language liturgy that predates the Second Vatican Council; it was last revised in the 1962 edition of the Roman Missal.

The papal secretary said he carefully read the press clippings and public comments about the document and was “a bit surprised that there were not any truly negative reactions.”

The few critical remarks he saw, he said, “are something completely normal and acceptable.”

“Let us hope that the reception bears good fruit and the desired results,” he said.