

Pope's visit will be good for country, says archbishop

When Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien was rector of the Pontifical North American College in Rome in the early 1990s, he often saw then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger walking from his offices across the square at St. Peter's. Dressed in a simple priest's cassock, the future pope would sometimes stop and talk to Archbishop O'Brien - especially if he saw the rector with seminarians.

Though humble and unassuming, Cardinal Ratzinger possessed a keen intellect, Archbishop O'Brien remembered. It's an intellect that's of great service to the church then and now, he said.

The upcoming papal visit to the United States will be an opportunity to learn and be inspired by the pope, Archbishop O'Brien said.

"I think it will do a lot of good for the country," Archbishop O'Brien said. "I think it will focus the attention on some of the essentials that we forget sometimes."

Archbishop O'Brien recalled that when Cardinal Ratzinger was prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, he met with him on ad limina visits - periodic meetings with bishops of different regions of the world. The future pope easily absorbed the most "intricate and complicated of discussions" touching on canon law and civil law, Archbishop O'Brien said.

"At the end, he would summarize the thing in five minutes as if he had been studying it all his life," said Archbishop O'Brien.

"He has an extraordinary mind."

The pope's intellect is accompanied by a sense of openness and an ability to engage people, Archbishop O'Brien said.

" He listens very carefully and very closely," Archbishop O'Brien said.

" Whether he would agree or not on every point, he'd always find a positive as any good teacher would."

Archbishop O'Brien first met the pope when then Cardinal Ratzinger visited St. Joseph Seminary at Dunwoodie in Yonkers, N. Y., where Archbishop O'Brien was rector. He has spoken to the pope one- on- one about a dozen times. In February, Archbishop O'Brien said he thanked Pope Benedict for appointing him archbishop of Baltimore.

" He said, 'Ah! Baltimore,' "Archbishop O'Brien remembered with a smile, "'the first archdiocese in the United States.' "