

Vacationing pope stays mostly within privacy of mountain villa

LORENZAGO DI CADORE, Italy – To the disappointment of the media and local residents, Pope Benedict XVI, who arrived at his mountain vacation lodgings July 9, did not venture beyond the villa's superprivate property until late July 11.

Even then, his destination – the tiny 17th-century chapel of Our Lady of Loreto in nearby Lozzo – was kept secret until after his return. All but one of the people who saw his little motorcade pass had to be content with a glimpse and a drive-by wave.

The exception was Sister Maria Basso, who told the newspaper *Avvenire*, "I was walking when the car slowed down and the pope put his hand out the window."

She said she told Pope Benedict that she works at a nearby home for the elderly and, smiling, he said, "I, too, am elderly."

In anticipation of the pope's visit, the villa in Lorenzago di Cadore where the pope is staying was repainted and slightly remodeled, and a baby grand piano was brought in for the piano-playing pontiff.

The biggest change, however, was the addition of a 6-foot-high, dark-plastic-covered privacy fence around the perimeter of the church-owned villa. The 600 residents of Lorenzago di Cadore and news photographers can catch sight of the pope only if he leaves the property.

After the July 11 visit to the chapel in Lozzo, the pope made another evening outing July 12, heading toward the Stabie Valley, home to a small Marian chapel that Pope John Paul II liked to visit when he was staying in Lorenzago di Cadore.

The Vatican did not say where the pope went, but Pope Benedict did stop on the way back to Lorenzago di Cadore to chat with well-wishers who had gathered on the side of the road.

Two little girls handed him flowers they had picked. The pope asked if they were on vacation, too. When a response was not forthcoming, he asked, "Are you nervous?" then spoke with the girls' parents.

A group of journalists also was on hand, and the pope asked them how they managed to find him.

He smiled and jokingly answered his own question, "Journalists always know everything."

For the July 11 feast of St. Benedict, the parish in Lorenzago di Cadore held a concert in the pope's honor and inaugurated the newly restored 18th-century organ in the church.

Parishioners obviously hoped Pope Benedict would join them, but they had to be content with a visit from the pope's private secretary, Monsignor Georg Ganswein, who arrived with a papal message.

The pope thanked the townspeople for their welcome and for their prayers, "which I count on very much to fulfill the mission the Lord has entrusted to me."

He also praised their decision to restore the organ, "the king of musical instruments," and he assured them of his prayers.

The Vatican had announced that during his July 9-27 mountain vacation the pope would make public appearances only for the recitation of the Angelus prayer at noon on Sundays.

But Bishop Giuseppe Andrich of Belluno and Feltre told Vatican Radio July 11 that he and Bishop Andrea Mazzocato of Treviso had been told the pope would meet with the priests of the two dioceses.

Bishop Andrich, whose diocese includes Lorenzago di Cadore, and Bishop Mazzocato, whose diocese owns the house where the pope is staying, said a date for the meeting had not been announced.

During his first Alpine vacation as pope, in 2005, he met with the priests and religious of Italy's Valle d'Aosta region, spending about two hours responding to their questions. Pope Benedict returned to Valle d'Aosta for his 2006 vacation.

Lorenzago di Cadore is in Italy's Veneto region.