

Word at the Stadium: Thoughts on Benedict's Appearance at the Baseball Behemoth

Eleonora Mazzucchi (April 20, 2008)



Downtown Manhattan residents weren't too hot on Pope Benedict XVI. But here's the other side of the coin. Outside of Yankee Stadium the crowds waiting for Benedict to pass through--provided they weren't there to push the agendas of other Christian denominations--were keen on the new Pope. They couldn't attend the large-scale mass but most of them did their best to provide a welcome wagon.

On an uncharacteristically gray Sunday morning in April, Pope Benedict XVI was to drive through the



street where the sun don't shine. Hundreds upon hundreds of people waited at the shadowy underpass outside of Yankee Stadium, just in the hopes of catching a glimpse of Benedict's motorcade, due hours later. The thousands attending the mass had already entered the stadium, filing through in an endless line only the early days of the Rolling Stones could've seen. Those left behind, those without tickets to the service, were simple well-wishers anxiously peering down the barricaded street and counting down the hours and the minutes before the Pope's arrival. Among the Catholic-inclined crowds were vendors of kitschy Pope merchandise—"get your Pope flag! A hat for the kids!"—people hoping to nab tickets at the last minute (curiously, there were no scalpers to satisfy their requests) and proselytizers from other Christian faiths wielding megaphones and pamphlets. The latter made much more noise than the expectant bystanders and, armored in the signs that those guys on Broadway advertising men's suits wear, elbowed their way through the throngs shouting that Mary was no virgin and that only Christ could save your soul. The baseball bar maidens in their aprons, leaning in the doorway and smoking cigarettes, looked on at the charade vacant and unimpressed.

It was a scene for the ages. I was curious to know what these people, most of them outer-borough (in other words, outer-Manhattan) residents, thought of the Pope they had sacrificed a Sunday morning for. They could've been having an English muffin at home and catching the morning news, but they were here instead. Either they loved this man, this religious, spiritual and institutional figure, or they felt the dire need to vent their grievances against him.

Here's what some of them (with the exclusion of verbally reticent nuns) had to say:

Freddy, 30:

"I think his visit is good for all of us. We need his blessing. Right now the U.S. is in a difficult situation, with the war and the economy, and the Pope is a person with power in the world. His speech can be helpful and his visit at this moment is important."

Debbie, 50:

"It's great that he's here to bless this city. With Ground Zero and everything that's happened, there's a lot of hurt. He's here to give us hope and peace and to guide us, and it's our job to listen. Obviously he needs to clean house after the recent pedophilia scandals, but I think his being here addresses that in part. It gives me a great spiritual feeling just standing here right now."

Adam, 19, Evangelical:

"Paul makes it clear that Christ is the head of the church. He's in complete contradiction with the Bible and he's not the vehicle between Christ and the people. The Pope can offer no hope. These aren't even difficult times, there have been worse times in history and people are just spoiled and not looking to Christ for salvation. I'm here because I do ministry work and I go where there's a call."

Margarita, 33:

"The Pope is the sun."

Shantay, 14:

"He's a very special person. He takes time off to go around the world and bless people. It really means a lot to me. I didn't know the last Pope that well, so I don't see much difference between him and this Pope."

Kimberly, 44, Vegetarians for Christ:

"I wish he would speak out about vegetarianism more directly and tell Catholics to go veg. He needs to address the cruelty against animals that's involved and remind people that in Genesis, it said God gave us fruits and vegetables to eat. Cruelty and misery and torture are from Satan. But I'm delighted that Benedict is here and I've pretty much enjoyed his message."



Estrella, 55:

"It gives you a good feeling to see him in person. Maybe seeing him our requests will be granted. You know when you have a sickness inside you seeing him can heal you."

Christopher, 14:

"I think he's going to do great things in the future, especially with abortion—which I'm glad he's against—and immigration. He believes in keeping families together, and as a son of immigrants that's important to me. You have to look at religion from the inside, like he said at St. Patrick's yesterday: everybody can see the outside of a car but you have to look inside. [Pause] What sex scandals?"

Jorge, 42:

"I think the Pope is part of our Hispanic tradition. He's a powerful man representing our religion here and that helps to pass on the faith to future generations. The last Pope definitely had a different style, was less orthodox and more of a hippie. But Catholics are confused right now, straying and moving in different directions. Hopefully they will feel inspired today."

Battrina, 45, Seventh-Day Adventist:

"I believe he's the antichrist. He supports the day of rest being Sunday instead of Saturday, and he's affiliated with the Inquisition. He wants to burn people like heretics."

Like in baseball, you win some, you lose some.

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