

# Christ our hope



Archbishop  
Alfred C.  
**HUGHES**

The pastoral visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States of America is now history. He came proclaiming the message: "Christ is our hope." The theme resonated through all of the messages he delivered to various audiences and congregations in the course of six days with us. He came to build on the strengths of the Church and our country. He addressed with depth some of the issues facing us. He always urged us to practical application.

The Pope's words on the South Lawn at the White House noted that from the very beginning the principles

governing political and social life were recognized by our Founding Fathers as linked to a moral order based on the dominion of God the Creator. It was in this context that the framers of the founding documents proclaimed that all men are created equal and endowed with inalienable rights grounded in the laws of nature and of nature's God. He affirmed the strong religious convictions pervasive in American people. He also made clear that the gift of freedom summons us to personal responsibility. Democracy without values can lose its soul. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation.

Our Holy Father's address to the bishops was profound in its insight and breathtaking in its scope. He called us all at the very beginning of his remarks to remember the inscription of Emma Lazarus on our Statue of Liberty call-

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ing us to welcome the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free. He recognized the remarkable generosity of the American people. He also cautioned us to recognize that material horizons are suffocating when they do not open to the divine and eternal. He saluted the rich cultural diversity and commitment of Catholic laity. He also urged us to recognize the critical importance of offering appropriate education and formation in the faith at every level of life. He urged us to recognize the importance of bringing faith and moral conviction to the public debate. He was not afraid to address the clergy sex abuse crisis scandal.

At The Catholic University of America our Holy Father called those engaged in edu-

cation to see leading young people to meet Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, as the central mission. Educators must take seriously the personal struggles of students, the moral confusion in our society and the fragmentation of knowledge. Fidelity to this task not only involves orthodoxy in course content, but also the development of communities of learning that reverberate with the ecclesial life of faith. Academic freedom is an important commitment for Catholic colleges and universities, but does not justify the embrace of positions contradicting faith and the teaching of the Church.

Our Holy Father sought many different ways to encourage young people to turn over their lives to the Lord, no matter what their calling may be. He also urged them to be open to a special call for service in the Church. He extended a hand of friendship

to representatives from other Christian churches and from other faiths. He held up the values of genuine dialogue in pursuit of truth that bring together both faith and reason in a truly complementary way.

The surprising special moment for me personally was to be invited at the end of his talk to the bishops to come up and receive a beautiful chalice given to the faithful of New Orleans as an expression of commendation for the religious and humanitarian response the local church made in the post-Katrina period and as an expression of solidarity with the suffering that so many have endured. I received this in the name of so many who led the efforts of recovery and response to those in need in the name of the Church in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. God grant that Pope Benedict's message of hope may strengthen us all!

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## On N.Y. subway, Gregorian chant gets a shout out



**BRANDON BRISCOE**  
GUEST COLUMN

You are likely to hear all sorts of unprintable things in a New York City subway car, but strains of the "Salve Regina" are not typically part of the subterranean transit soundtrack. Leave it to the supposedly shy and retiring Pope Benedict to change that.

Notes of the Latin hymn, hushed at first, quickly filled a car of a downtown-bound D train that whisked me away from the pope's Mass at Yankee Stadium on April 20. Chatter came to a halt as those who knew the words chimed in, while others drew silent to listen. It was a moment of quiet beauty in a city known for everything else.

Indeed, the scholarly Benedict's presence brought a new spirit to New York and a new energy to Catholicism in the United States. To those of

us on the ground, that new energy was palpable and its effects evident.

There was the crowd roaring in welcoming delight at first sight of Benedict. There was the on-duty police officer making the sign of the cross as Mass began, protecting and praying at the same time. There was the cab driver – a semi-practicing Muslim – dying to know how I landed a ticket to see the pope. And there was the pope himself, flashing a joyful smile when he forgot to deliver a portion of his remarks.

If you watched on television, the images were no different. Here comes President Bush, bounding down the tarmac to greet Benedict's plane, later praising his "awesome speech." There go 20,000 young people held in rapt attention, cheering enthusiastically to a dramatic line 10 long paragraphs into Benedict's remarks.

Smiles and applause followed him almost everywhere – from Mass at Nationals Stadium, to an address at the United Nations, to a meeting with bishops and another

with Catholic educators, to an ecumenical prayer service, to a synagogue visit for Passover.

There were tears, too, at ground zero and in a meeting with abuse victims.

Whether in joy or sorrow, Benedict constantly imparted energy and enthusiasm, and all this from an older vicar of Christ who supposedly keeps a lighter schedule than his predecessor.

Popes – the modern ones, anyway – have this uplifting effect. My parents took me to see John Paul the Great drive down Canal Street here in New Orleans in 1987. I was too young to understand what he said, but he captivated my imagination. That spirit he brought was still with me 15 years later when I read his biography, "Witness to Hope," and heard in its pages God calling me to the seminary.

With the turbulent events in the recent life of the American Church, it might be said that a certain malaise has settled in, a communal wondering, "Now what?" That cry is even louder outside the Church in the secular world – whose capital might well be

New York – where relativism offers no firm answers about life and popular culture keeps people searching for the next big thing.

Those who saw Benedict – and especially those who heard him – know that this Peter came with the spirit of hope to reinvigorate the American Church and with a reminder of the Church's eternal answer to humanity's questions.

"Friends, again I ask you, what about today? What are you seeking? What is God whispering to you? The hope which never disappoints is Jesus Christ," he told us.

"You are Christ's disciples today. Shine his light upon this great city and beyond. Show the world the reason for the hope that resonates within you. Tell others about the truth that sets you free."

Pray. Keep freedom tethered to truth. Fix your gaze on Jesus Christ, our hope. This was his message; this was the spirit he brought. Let us take both to heart.

*Brandon Briscoe is in his second year of theology at Notre Dame Seminary.*