

## General Audience with His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI

### *In the Vatican*

Another early start saw the pilgrims on the road hoping to great good seats for the Papal. By far one of the most eagerly awaited events on the itinerary, there was great excitement and anticipation. Huge crowds were expected – Pope Benedict is attracting more to his Papal Audiences than Pope John Paul II. At first the weather was beautiful, but the rain which marked the trip to St Paul's made its reappearance and umbrellas were sprouting up all over St Peter's Square. The guide, Marina, a seasoned attendee,

which were in attendance began to play music and with thousands of flags waving, it seemed as if a carnival was taking place in the large square. Marina's placing proved perfect as the Holy Father passed right by the group: for most of them it was their first time to see Pope Benedict in the flesh. Meanwhile the weather improved and the sun came out. As the Pope's car made its way up to the steps of the Basilica troops of musicians in medieval dress preceded him and then formed a guard of honour as



knew exactly where to put the group for a good view of the Holy Father and a chance to get close to him as he passed by in the papal car. Fr John was seated in another section beside the Holy Father: a special ticket had been given by the Papal Household to allow him meet the Holy Father on behalf of the Fraternity and to present him with an icon of St Genesius and a letter of loyalty. In the meantime with a couple of hours before the Audience was to begin, members of the group passed the time chatting, praying, reading or just looking around to soak up the atmosphere, now and again donning the raincoats.

The Audience was scheduled to start at 10am, and soon after the bells rang out the hour, jubilant cheers from one side of the crowd announced the entry of the Holy Father. Various bands and musical groups

he passed. He then took his place at the chair and the Audience began.

In his talk the Holy Father continued his series of reflections on the life and teachings of St Paul for the Jubilee Year. Speaking first in Italian and then in a number of other languages including English, German, French, Spanish and Polish, he offered the crowds a meditation on St Paul's teaching on the Cross and its place in the Christian life. Given that our pilgrimage had come to Rome to honour the martyr Genesius, the subject was very appropriate.

Following the talk the Holy Father greeted the various languages groups. During the introduction of the English-speaking pilgrims at the Audience, when the Fraternity was mentioned our pilgrims roared a greeted to the Holy Father which he acknowledged with a wave. The Audience ended

with a sung *Pater Noster*, and then the Holy Father imparted his Apostolic Blessing to the crowd, telling us it was given to all present and to our loved ones at home: by intention the members of the Fraternity around the world were included.



*Pope Benedict greets Bishop Smith*

After the Audience the bishops who were present came forward to meet the Pope. Bishop Smith, in his meeting with the Holy Father thanked him for his service of the Word of the Lord and the Church. The Holy Father then came to greet the invited guests among them, Fr John. In a meeting which lasted about five or six minutes, Fr John told the Holy Father about the Fraternity, its works and aims, and the Pope called it a “wonderful work”. Fr John then presented the Holy Father with an icon of St Genesius and a letter of greeting from the Fraternity. After a few personal words, the meeting ended as the Holy Father gave him the gift of a Rosary.



*Fr John presents the Holy Father with an Icon of St Genesius*

Meanwhile Bishop Smith and another Irish Bishop, the retired Bishop of Down and Connor, Bishop Patrick Walsh, went down into the square to greet members of the Fraternity. With a trip to Nettuno in the afternoon, the group soon made its way to the now familiar bar for lunch and time to discuss the morning's events.



*Well placed: the group waits for the Holy Father*



*“Is he there yet?” Caroline McCamley and Frances Fleming engage with the camera, John Walsh, Seamus Bellew and Christopher McCamley keep watch*



*Taking it all in: Tom Hogan, in a reflective mood*



*Bishop Smith with our pilgrims after the Audience*