LAKE CHARLES – Some 200 people joined Bishop Glen John Provost as he celebrated Mass in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, giving thanks to Almighty God for the ministry of Pope Benedict XVI on Thursday concluding at nearly the final moment of his papacy - 1 p.m..

Benedict XVI, now the Pontiff Emeritus, left the Vatican by helicopter at 10 a.m. (5 p.m in Rome) for Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer residence. The bells of Catholic churches in the Diocese of Lake Charles rang out at 1 p.m. to honor Benedict XVI and also signified the reign of the 265th Pope had ended and the Chair of Peter was vacant.

In his homily, which can be viewed in its entirety at Mass of Thanksgiving for His Holiness Benedict XVI, Pontiff Emeritus , Bishop Provost noted he as a priest he had felt an affinity to Pope Paul VI, who ordained him in 1975, and that the same is true of "a bishop and the pope who appointed him. We are human beings after all and should and must acknowledge our attachments. For myself I must confess mixed feelings. I know history. I know what our Church law says. Others have resigned in the past, though it is rare. The law allows for it. But I am saddened at his departure. Pope Benedict XVI appointed me Bishop of Lake Charles. That in itself is a mystery to me, but there it is. I accepted it as the will of God, because the Vicar of Christ had willed it. He had personally signed the document appointing me, something not always done by past pontiffs. I saw it as a special link between him and me, not just with the office of St. Peter but with the person of Benedict XVI. There was a personal dimension to it. I felt it then. I feel it now."

Before his appointment to Lake Charles, Bishop Provost said he had never met the Holy Father, though he had read a great deal of what he wrote as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

"As an old student of literature, I knew that someone's writing always reveals something of himself. The books of Joseph Ratzinger were a mirror into his life of faith. I liked his lucid

thought, his clear explanations of complex ideas, and his ability to articulate the mysteries of the faith in modern language. In an age where many are not sure what they believe and run after the latest craze or opinion, when Cardinal Ratzinger wrote or Pope Benedict XVI spoke you knew that you were getting the “straight story.” There was nothing of self-interest, no posturing, and no hidden agenda. How different from many modern leaders! How unlike the modern world!"

In his closing comments, Bishop Provost said, "We will miss him. What he did he knew before God he had to do. All should respect that. And for a very productive, fruitful, and gifted pontificate as the Bishop of Rome and the Vicar of Christ, we offer a heartfelt 'Thank you.'"

In an emotional address at the last weekly public audience of his pontificate on Wednesday, Benedict XVI promised the faithful that he would continue to serve the Church through prayer after his resignation.

The Pope remarked that “whoever assumes the Petrine ministry no longer has any privacy. He belongs always and entirely to everyone, to the whole Church. His life, so to speak, is totally deprived of its private dimension.” After resignation, he said, “I am not returning to private life, to a life of trips, meetings, receptions, conferences, etc. I am not abandoning the Cross.” He said that he would remain entirely devoted to the Church, "in the service of prayer.” Pope Benedict said that throughout his pontificate he had felt the strong support of the Holy Spirit and of the faithful. “Thank you; I am truly moved,” the Pope said to the tens of thousands of people in St. Peter’s Square for the audience, and who interrupted him repeatedly with loud applause.

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