



The Coat of Arms of Pope Benedict XVI

For at least eight centuries, popes have symbolized the heart of their papal ministries by designing their own coat of arms.

Personal Symbols

Pope Benedict XVI's coat of arms has three personal elements:

1. A shell

The central element of the shield is a large gold shell. In his autobiography *Milestones, Memoirs: 1927-1977*, he explained his reason for using it in his coat of arms as archbishop of Munich and Freising: It is "above all the sign of our being pilgrims, of our being on a journey."

The shell also represents the story of St. Augustine meeting a boy on the seashore who was scooping water from the sea and pouring it into a small hole that he had dug in the sand. The Saint compared this seemingly useless activity to attempts by our limited human minds to understand the infinite mystery of the divine.

2. The Moor of Freising

The upper left-hand corner depicts a brown-faced Moor with a crown and collar. It comes from Pope Benedict's Bavarian heritage as Joseph Ratzinger and from the archdiocese where he had served as Bishop Ratzinger. It has been used in the shields of the bishops of Freising for a thousand years. Uncertain of its original meaning, Pope Benedict sees it as "an expression of the universality of the Church, which knows no distinctions of race or class since all are one in Christ (Galatians 3:28)."

3. St. Corbinian's bear

The upper right-hand corner of the shield depicts a brown bear with a pack on its back. This comes from an old Bavarian legend about St. Corbinian, the first bishop and patron saint of the Diocese of Freising. As the story goes, the Saint was traveling to Rome one day when a bear attacked and killed his horse. St. Corbinian punished the bear by making him carry his belongings the rest of the way to Rome.

The bear symbolizes the beast tamed by the grace of God. The pack he is carrying symbolizes the weight of the bishop's ministry. While serving at the Vatican as a Cardinal, Ratzinger wrote in his autobiography: "The bear with the pack, which replaced the horse or, more probably, St. Corbinian's mule, becoming, against his will, his pack animal: was that not, and is it not an image of what I should be and of what I am?"

Catholic Symbols

On the back of the shield are the papal keys in remembrance of Christ's words to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

Papal Symbols

Benedict XVI introduced two new features to his papal coat of arms:

1. Miter

A miter replaces the old papal tiara, which had been an image of royalty left over from the days when popes were sometimes more political than spiritual. The papal miter on his shield is silver and has three gold stripes, symbolizing the Supreme Pontiff's three powers: order, jurisdiction and magisterium.

2. Pallium

A white pallium with black crosses is draped below the shield. The pallium is a woolen stole symbolizing a bishop's authority. It's the typical liturgical insignia of the Supreme Pontiff, indicating his responsibility as the chief shepherd of Christ's flock. During earliest centuries, popes wore genuine sheepskin on their shoulders. Later, they started using a white woolen band instead.

