



President Joe Biden signs a condolence book at the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See in Washington, Thursday, Jan. 5, 2023, for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Benedict died at 95 on Dec. 31, 2022, in the monastery on the Vatican grounds where he had spent nearly all of his decade in retirement. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky)

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President Joe Biden on Jan. 5 paid his respects to Benedict XVI, the first pope to resign in six centuries, following his burial during a ceremony at the Vatican.

Benedict, who became pope emeritus after stepping down from his role as leader of the Roman Catholic church in 2013, died Dec. 31 at age 95.

Biden, who is Catholic, visited the Vatican embassy, formally known as the Apostolic Nunciature of the Holy See, to sign the condolence book for Benedict.

"It's a great honor," Biden said after writing in the book, which was opened on a small desk with a large portrait of Benedict in the background.

Biden wrote: "Together with Catholics across the United States, I join in mourning the passing of Pope Emeritus Benedict. He was a brilliant scholar and truly Holy Man. I will always cherish our time together at the Vatican when he was Pope discussing Catholic theology. He was a great theologian and I learned much in a few hours. May his soul rest eternally with the Lord."

Biden told reporters on Jan. 4 that Benedict was a "fine man" and he recalled spending a few hours with the late pope. He said the conversation "reminded me of going back to theology class."

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"I found him to be relaxing and very rational," Biden said, adding that Benedict had "a more conservative view within the Catholic realm than I have."

But, "I admired him. I thought he was a fine man," the president said.

Biden also said he had inquired about attending Benedict's funeral but concluded that his presence would have been too disruptive because of the large number of security officers, White House aides, other officials and journalists that he travels with.

"We would just get in the way," Biden said.

The current pope, Francis, joined tens of thousands of the Catholic faithful on Jan. 5 to bid farewell to Benedict XVI at a rare requiem Mass for a dead pope presided over

by a living one. Benedict was buried in a grotto beneath St. Peter's Basilica.