



The Symbols of Pope Benedict's Coat of Arms



Every pope chooses a design for his coat of arms, or crest. The one you see here is Pope Benedict's. Some of the things represented on it are symbols of his office, the papacy, while some are personal to Pope Benedict.

Symbols of the Papacy

At the top of the crest is a bishop's hat, called a **miter**. There is a special three-tiered tiara, or triple crown, that has long been a traditional headpiece for the pope, usually bestowed on him during his inauguration as pope. (That ceremony used to be called a coronation, therefore the crown.) But Pope Benedict chose to use a bishop's miter with three tiers. The three lines going across the miter represent the three powers of the pope. The vertical line going through the tiers shows their unity in one person.

Two crossed **keys** symbolize the authority Jesus gave Peter, our first pope. This authority is inherited by every pope. The gold key stands for the power in heaven and the silver key stands for the pope's spiritual authority on earth.

Hanging from the bottom of the crest is the white **pallium** with red crosses, which represent the blood of Christ. A pallium is a long woolen scarf worn over the pope's shoulders to indicate that he is the Shepherd of Christ's flock.

Symbols of Pope Benedict XVI

Beneath the keys is a shield with symbols chosen by Pope Benedict that tell us his personal story. Each symbol represents something about his past or a legend that is important to him.

In the left corner of the shield is the head of a **Moor** (a person from northern Africa) with red lips, crown, and collar. This figure is a symbol of the former Diocese of Freising in Germany,

where the Pope once served as archbishop. Pope Benedict said this symbol expresses the universality of the Church, where all races and classes of people are one in Christ.

In the right corner is a **bear** with a pack on its back. This reminds the Pope of a Bavarian legend about the first bishop of Freising, St. Corbinian, who was traveling to Rome on horseback.

I have carried my pack to Rome and wander for some time now through the streets of the Eternal City. When release will come I cannot know. What I do know is that I am God's pack animal, and, as such, close to him.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his memoir, *Milestones*

Along came a bear who killed the horse. St. Corbinian then made the bear carry everything on its back for the rest of the journey. Pope Benedict says the bear represents him and the pack represents the weight of his responsibilities as pope.

In the middle and lower part of the shield is a gold **shell** on a red background. The shell has significance to the Pope and reminds him of another legend. St. Augustine was walking by the sea one day and saw a boy using a shell to scoop water from the sea into a hole on the shore. St. Augustine thought this was an analogy of how humans try to understand things that are beyond understanding, like the Trinity. The shell, then, reminds the Pope of the mysteries of our faith that are beyond human understanding.