

Germans present Pope Benedict with his own papal crown

By David Kerr

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Milka Botcheva and Dieter Philippi display Pope Benedict's tiara.

Pope Benedict XVI did not have a papal tiara until today. At the May 25 General Audience he was presented with one by the Catholics of his native Germany.

The man behind the project, Dieter Philippi, met with EWTN News before the handover ceremony.

"Well, we thought how every Pope in the past had a tiara. Even John Paul II had one. That was a present from Hungarian Catholics given to him in 1981. So we thought about making a tiara from German Catholics to hand over to the present Pope."

Dieter is from Kirkel in the Saarland region of western Germany. By day he's a chief executive of a telecommunications company. In his spare time, though, he's an avid collector of religious headgear. In fact, he now has over 500 hats from numerous world religions.

And it was Dieter who commissioned the tiara from a workshop in the Bulgarian capital of Sophia.

"They specialize in Orthodox vestments and Orthodox mitres. So they have the knowledge and skill to make a tiara, because in other countries it's now very difficult to find craftsmen and women with the knowledge of how to make a

tiara. That's because it takes such specialist skills."

The metal used is a mixture of zinc, silver and brass. This made it very malleable when sculpting fine detail. The stones used are semi-precious.

Milka Botcheva, who was part of the team that worked on the project, explained, "When we were working on it we never expected it would come this far, that it would come to Vatican."

"So I'm proud of all of us, all the team. I believe this really is a miracle," she said.

The papal tiara was worn by Popes at their coronation between the 14th and 20th centuries. The last Pope to have a coronation was Pope Paul VI, in 1963.

It seems there's no absolute certainty about the symbolism but during papal coronations the following words were uttered as the tiara was placed on the Pope's head:

"Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns and know that thou art Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, Vicar of Our Savior Jesus Christ on earth, to whom is honor and glory in the ages of ages."

Pope Benedict, of course, didn't undergo a coronation. Neither does he have the tiara on his papal coat of arms. Dieter Philippi, though, would like to see some of the traditions surrounding the papal tiara revived.

"I think nowadays it would be very difficult because people wouldn't understand the symbolism of a coronation ... But from my personal view I would be very happy if we had a Pope who was crowned again like a king or a queen of any other country, yes."

His more immediate concern is to find a home for the new papal tiara. There's a possibility it might be put on display in at the birthplace of Pope Benedict—Marktl am Inn in Bavaria.

As for what Dieter planned to say to the Pope today?

"I will tell him that I'm very, very happy that I had the chance to hand the tiara over to him and that I'm very happy that a German Pope gets a tiara from the German Catholics."

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