

READ REFLECT AND REVIEW

SESSION 2

LETTERS, ENCYCLICALS AND LIVES OF SAINTS

DEUS CARITAS EST AND SPE SALVI

READ

DURING THE PAST 200 YEARS, ENCYCLICALS HAVE BECOME AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE PAPACY. THESE LETTERS HAVE GIVEN POPES THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS URGENT CONCERNS IN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD. PRIOR TO THAT THERE MAY HAVE BEEN “ENCYCLICAL” LETTERS, FROM THE POPE ADDRESSED TO BISHOPS OF A PARTICULAR REGION, BUT THE MORE FORMAL TYPE OF LETTER DIDN’T COME INTO EXISTENCE UNTIL 1740.

HOWEVER, THE ROLE OF ENCYCLICALS HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS AND IN RECENT TIMES POPE BENEDICT XVI HAS WRITTEN THREE, THEIR COMMON THREAD BEING : “CHRISTIANITY IS A LOVE STORY”. A FOURTH WAS JOINTLY WRITTEN WITH POPE FRANCIS.

REMEMBER HIS FIRST? BENEDICT SURPRISED THE WORLD WHEN HE PUBLISHED *DEUS CARITAS EST* (ON CHRISTIAN LOVE—GOD IS LOVE) ON CHRISTMAS DAY 2005. THE MEDIA WAS STILL REFERRING TO HIM AS “THE ROTTWEILER” AND PAINTING A PICTURE OF A RUTHLESS DISCIPLINARIAN. THE SURPRISE WAS THAT INSTEAD OF FOCUSING ON RESHAPING THE CHURCH, POPE BENEDICT SPOKE OF THE TYPES OF LOVE: AGAPE, EROS, FILIA. *DEUS CARITAS EST* EXPLORED LOVE AS SEEN THROUGH A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE, AND GOD’S PLACE WITHIN ALL LOVE.

AT THE BEGINNING OF *DEUS CARITAS EST*, WE READ:

“WE HAVE COME TO BELIEVE IN GOD’S LOVE: IN THESE WORDS THE CHRISTIAN CAN EXPRESS THE FUNDAMENTAL DECISION OF HIS LIFE. BEING CHRISTIAN IS NOT THE RESULT OF AN ETHICAL CHOICE OR A LOFTY IDEA, BUT THE ENCOUNTER WITH AN EVENT, A PERSON, WHICH GIVES LIFE A NEW HORIZON AND A DECISIVE DIRECTION” (DCE, 1). BENEDICT WARNS THAT, WHILE TECHNICAL SKILL IS ESSENTIAL IN MANY WORKS OF CHARITY, “HUMAN BEINGS ALWAYS NEED SOMETHING MORE THAN TECHNICALLY PROPER CARE. THEY NEED HUMANITY. THEY NEED HEARTFELT CONCERN” (DCE, 31). THUS, IN ADDITION TO THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE THAT IS ESSENTIAL TO ANY SERVICE, BENEDICT SPEAKS OF THE NEED FOR A “FORMATION OF THE HEART”; OF “A HEART WHICH SEES”, THAT PERCEIVES “WHERE LOVE IS NEEDED AND ACTS ACCORDINGLY”.

IN A CHRISTMAS HOMILY BENEDICT SUMMARISED : *WHERE THERE IS LOVE, LIGHT SHINES FORTH IN THE WORLD; WHERE THERE IS HATRED, THE WORLD REMAINS IN DARKNESS. IN THE STABLE OF BETHLEHEM THERE APPEARED THE GREAT LIGHT WHICH THE WORLD AWAITS. IN THAT CHILD LYING IN THE STABLE, GOD HAS SHOWN HIS GLORY – THE GLORY OF LOVE, WHICH GIVES ITSELF AWAY, STRIPPING ITSELF OF ALL GRANDEUR TO GUIDE US ALONG THE WAY OF LOVE. THE LIGHT OF BETHLEHEM HAS NEVER BEEN EXTINGUISHED. FROM BETHLEHEM A STREAM OF LIGHT, LOVE, AND TRUTH SPREADS THROUGH THE CENTURIES. IF WE LOOK TO THE SAINTS – FROM PAUL AND AUGUSTINE TO FRANCIS AND DOMINIC, FROM FRANCIS XAVIER AND TERESA OF AVILA TO MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA*

– WE SEE THIS FLOOD OF GOODNESS, THIS PATH OF LIGHT KINDLED EVER ANEW BY THE MYSTERY OF BETHLEHEM, BY THAT GOD WHO BECAME A CHILD. IN THAT CHILD, GOD COUNTERED THE VIOLENCE OF THIS WORLD WITH HIS OWN GOODNESS. HE CALLS US TO FOLLOW THAT CHILD.”

IN HIS SECOND ENCYCLICAL, *SPE SALVI*, POPE BENEDICT EXPLORED THE RELATION BETWEEN HOPE AND REDEMPTION, CITING **ROMANS 8:24**, “FOR IN HOPE WE HAVE BEEN SAVED. BUT HOPE THAT IS SEEN IS NOT HOPE. FOR WHO HOPES FOR WHAT HE ALREADY SEES?”

BENEDICT DREW FROM HISTORY IN *SPE SALVI*, POINTING TO HOPE AS IT WAS IN THE LIVES OF SAINTS, CONTEMPORARIES AND MYSTICS INCLUDING **AUGUSTINE** OF HIPPO AND **BERNARD** OF CLAIRVAUX, AS WELL AS PHILOSOPHERS, THEOLOGIANs, POLITICIANS, AND MORE. IN ESTABLISHING HIS CONCERN FOR AUTHENTIC HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, BENEDICT DRAWS HIS THREE ENCYCLICALS TOGETHER: “**LOVE IS GOD’S GREATEST GIFT TO HUMANITY, IT IS HIS PROMISE AND OUR HOPE**” (CV, 2).

REFLECT

‘THE GENIUS OF BENEDICT XVI IS HIS CAPACITY TO ENTER THE HEART OF MAN. HE KNOWS OF WHAT WE ARE MADE, AND FOR WHAT WE ARE MADE.’(PASCHAL M. CORBY, OFM).

IN THE LIGHT OF WHAT YOU HAVE READ, REFLECT ON THE MEANING OF THIS STATEMENT. HAS IT AFFECTED ANY OF YOUR PREVIOUS PERCEPTIONS?

REVIEW

- 1 IS THERE ANY PART OF THIS SUMMARY WHICH I FEEL I WOULD LIKE TO FURTHER RESEARCH FOR MY OWN FORMATION IN THE FAITH?**
- 2 CAN I IDENTIFY ONE THOUGHT OR FACT FROM THIS READING WHICH WILL INSPIRE ME TO INCREASE MY COMMITMENT / AND ACTIVITY AS A KNIGHT?**
- 3 WHAT WOULD I LIKE TO DISCUSS FROM THIS READING?**

- **EACH KNIGHT IS INVITED TO BEGIN THE DAY WITH THE PEACE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS:**

LORD, MAKE ME AN INSTRUMENT OF YOUR PEACE.

WHERE THERE IS HATRED, LET ME SOW LOVE;

WHERE THERE IS INJURY, PARDON;

WHERE THERE IS DOUBT, FAITH;

WHERE THERE IS DESPAIR, HOPE;

WHERE THERE IS DARKNESS, LIGHT;

WHERE THERE IS SADNESS, JOY.

O, DIVINE MASTER, GRANT THAT I MAY NOT SO MUCH SEEK

TO BE CONSOLED AS TO CONSOLE;

TO BE UNDERSTOOD AS TO UNDERSTAND;

TO BE LOVED AS TO LOVE;

FOR IT IS IN GIVING THAT WE RECEIVE;

IT IS IN PARDONING THAT WE ARE PARDONED;

IT IS IN DYING THAT WE ARE BORN TO ETERNAL LIFE.