

Living the Spirit Pope Benedict

While many theologians will be aware of the core teaching of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, as Cardinal Ratzinger, many of us will not have made a special study of his writings and activities throughout his years as professor, bishop and member of the Curia in Rome. As we reflect on his writings, we will recognize the great influence he had on the writings of Pope John Paul II in regard to theological matters. It is necessary, however, to be forewarned if you decide to study these writings. They are necessarily often difficult for cursory and off-hand reading.

Pope Benedict has told us that his work in the Curia as protector of orthodox doctrine could never have been simply his own. As a cardinal in charge of the Congregation that seeks to protect the Church's authentic doctrines, he spoke of the necessary collaboration with others and his "communion with the Pope" that led him on his path, and gave him a vision into the future. One will, therefore, not expect to find in his work anything different from the teaching of Pope John Paul with whom he met regularly.

The Holy Father is a theologian and has considered many great questions of our times. An example is his understanding of cloning. He has seen the danger that cloning could result in, widespread sale of organs, human parts. He cautions that what is manufactured can easily be destroyed without any ethical value being engaged in the process. He has also spoken of the priority to be given within life issues. Abortion and euthanasia hold the place of first concern for the believer. While he has written about peace and the exercise of mercy in other life issues, he has made clear that there can be no difference of opinion justified "with regard to abortion and euthanasia."

The Holy Father's recent homilies or sermons, both before and after election as Supreme Pontiff, will be sources for much reflection by the members of the Church. These give us a wide view of his thinking and his concerns. We will find that he recognizes that there is an evident worldliness creeping into the Church. Many Catholics are forming their consciences in the light of their own subjective or personal convenience. For them there exists no absolutes. Meanwhile forces are subtly persecuting the Church, trying to undo its mission of bringing Christ to the world around us.

Perhaps the central mark of the teaching of Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict) is his concern about relativism. I suspect that he will be saying much about this in the future. Pope Benedict sees relativism as "the central problem for the faith at the present time." He describes it as an offshoot of the Western world and its forms of philosophical thought, while it is connected with the philosophical and religious intuitions of Asia (in a conference with bishops in 1996). Addressing the Cardinals before the Conclave as Dean of the College of Cardinals he said:

"How many winds of doctrine we have known in recent decades, how many ideological currents, how many ways of thinking. The small boat of thought of many Christians has often been tossed about by these waves – thrown from one extreme to the other: from Marxism to liberalism, even to libertinism; from collectivism to radical individualism; from atheism to a vague religious mysticism; from and

agnosticism to syncretism so forth. Every day new sects are created and what St. Paul says about human trickery comes true, with cunning that tries to draw into error (cf.Eph.4:14). Having clear faith based on the creed of the church is often labeled today as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism which is letting oneself be tossed and swept along by every wind of teaching looks like the only attitude up to today's standards. We are moving toward a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as certain and has as its highest goal one's own ego and one's own desires. However, we have a different goal: the Son of God, true man. He is the measure of true humanism. An adult and mature faith is deeply rooted in friendship with Christ."

In these words we find an emphasis on what the Pope desires to teach us about our faith. We are invited to see ourselves as tempted to live a life quite unbalanced in the area of spiritual values. We find ourselves far too often looking for our own way, not God's way. We pick and choose congenial commandments and leave aside those we find difficult. We believe we know all, forgetting how little even the wisest man knows when compared to the wisdom of God's Truth. Our age does not understand the challenges of life's ebb and flow. It leaves its devotees lonely without Christ. Even adherence to the church is often just a habit, empty of meaningful and intense communion with God and one another.

The media has been giving us a rather distorted picture of the man who is now our pope. For them it is natural to seek out what seems strict and disciplined and find it unpalatable. Those who know Pope Benedict personally tell us a different story. They tell us of his humility and his friendly nature. He will, I am sure, grow in our estimation as time goes by. For myself I have been most impressed by the fact that he has a transparent relationship with Jesus as a Friend. He wants us to have the same. And he tells us how to have that relationship of friendship – the Holy Eucharist!

Some Personal Reflections

As I write this I am all too aware that another year of priestly life has gone by for me. I do so in the memory of the happy days of celebration last year. How good God has been to give me another year! And to tell the truth, how good He has been to my classmates in this regard. Our challenge has been for us to be good to Him and to His church. That is why I ask your continued prayers for priests. Young or old or just in-between, they need your support and encouragement. Momentary celebrations are fine, but persevering prayer is what is needed. Knowing your goodness, I want to thank you again and again for all you do for your priests and for the church at large. Pray, too, for vocations! It is a wonderful vocation and those called should be ready to accept the call.

May is a month dedicated to Mary, our Mother and the Mother of Jesus. It happens as well that in our country the second Sunday of May salutes all mothers. We are happy to recognize them. We thank them for their noble vocation and the love they give their children in ordinary and extraordinary ways. Each of us reading this can thank the woman who said yes to life, our life. They have made it possible for us to become adopted sons and daughters of a generous and loving God. The very best way to be grateful is to live in a way worthy of the love we have received. That is how to honor our mothers. Give your mother the joy of knowing that you are really a child of God!

God love you always!

Monsignor Morrison