

"Benedict XVI"

Homily of April 24, 2005

by Father Brian Joyce

Today, the Catholic Church welcomes and installs a new Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI. And the election of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger as the new Pope has been met with delight around the world, with some distress around the world, and with a certain amount of concern around the world.

First of all, his selection as Pope Benedict XVI has been met with a great deal of delight, first of all, because it is very clear that he will continue the vision and mission and outreach of Pope John Paul II, who has been widely praised for the last two weeks by everyone, from CNN News to Father Michael Dibble in our own pulpit. His selection has been met with delight in a cross-section of people from the cardinals who elected him so quickly to the Chief Rabbi of Israel, who said he found in him a kind and kindred spirit, someone who is highly sensitive to Christian-Jewish relations and whom he believed is the man behind all the progress made and reconciliation between Catholics and Jews over recent years. He was met with a great deal of delight because in his first homily he called for being faithful to the Second Vatican Council, for even more progress with inter-faith relations with Islam, with Judaism, and with other Christian Churches and with great cooperation and collaboration among Catholic leadership. He has been met with great delight because it is very well known that he is very bright and there is no substitute for brains. St. Theresa of Avila who was a great mystic, once taught in the 1500's that if you were choosing a spiritual advisor and you had a choice to make between someone who was holy and someone who was smart, she said, "Always go with the brains..... always go with the brains." And he is extremely gracious and a great listener. In fact, in today's homily, he talked about the importance of listening. Reminds me that Cardinal Seunens who was the chief architect of the Second Vatican Council, came to Berkeley in the 1960's and spoke at Sather Gate and he said, "God had a design for us. He gave all of us two ears and one mouth that we might learn to listen twice as much as we talk." And the man is a great listener.

So he has been met with a good deal of delight, but also with some distress. He is reputed to be a hardliner, conservative, and rigid. For the last twenty-four years his job description and his role has been to be the Pope's enforcer, the Pope's sergeant-at-arms, the Pope's theological bouncer. And the media, which has had an uncritical love affair with Pope John Paul II for the last two weeks, has suddenly become very suspicious and very critical, not as mean-spirited as the media in Germany and Britain, but pretty critical all the same. At the same time, there have been concerns raised, for example, his own brother said, "He's too old. He's too frail, and he should have said no." And Cardinal Ratzinger himself has said it's going to be a short term. I was amazed. I checked something this morning. Remember last week, Father Timoney got up and he mentioned that he had checked with an Irish bookie, Pattypower.com, and that the favorite was Ratzinger. As a matter of fact, he had

to announce at this morning's nine o'clock Mass, because I mentioned in the bulletin that he is leaving for Ireland in May, he said "I am not going back to collect my winnings." But if you go on Pattypower.com today you will find they have already published the odds for the next Pope..... concern about too short a term.

Where does the Holy Spirit fit in all of this? We have kind of an official answer because not long ago, one of the officials of the Vatican was asked, "What role does the Holy Spirit play in this selection of the Pope?" This official said, "Well, the Holy Spirit doesn't exactly pick each Pope because if you look at the list of Popes that we have had there obviously were a number the Holy Spirit would want nothing to do with. You have to have a more elastic sense of it than that, that the role of the Holy Spirit is only to give us the assurance that things cannot be totally ruined." Now, the person who said that was Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

So here we are with a sincere and widespread delight with the new Pope, with some distress and some cautious concerns. And the gospel we get is Jesus saying, "In my Father's house there are many mansions, many dwelling places, many rooms" and all centered on Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. It's a great gospel because Jesus is not just talking about the afterlife and life after death. He is talking about the quality of the Kingdom he preaches, and therefore, it must be the quality of the church and the community that tries to follow Jesus, that it is a roomy, large, generous place based on Jesus. We are called to be steadfast and nourished and faithful in the Catholic tradition at the same time that we have different views and disagreements about policies and a variety of spirituality and theologies and communities that range from the Catholic Worker to Opus Dei. And how on earth are we to stay together? How on earth are we to be "Catholic" which means "Universal" and, at the same time, in unity and one? Well, I think the answer is that we have a long, strong family history, the fancy word for it is Tradition with a capital "T." But we have a long strong family history and tradition that includes the Pope as important and necessary and a center of unity, but not in the sense of anti-Catholic bigotry over the years that has said that we "walk in lock step with the Pope, we take our orders from the Pope and the Pope is the Church's one foundation." No. No. We walk together with one another, along with the Pope, making sure that Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

You know this weekend is also Passover. And you may have noticed in the vestibule we put out two paintings there. And they are paintings of the Last Supper as a Seder Passover meal. They are not the Last Supper by Leonardo DaVinci, which we have right underneath the altar. (It is covered with the Easter decorations, but you all know what it looks like.) Now despite Dan Brown's "DaVinci Code" there are two things you have to know about DaVinci's painting of the Last Supper. Number one, there is no code in it. Number two, he seems to have gotten a lot of things wrong. We are sure he has the table setting wrong, the seating arrangement, and secondly, he probably has the guest list wrong. Now, the paintings outside, they are at least thought-provoking. They remind me that in 2001 a book was published called "The Woman's History of the World." And the title of it was "Who Cooked the Last Supper?"

You know we Catholics have a large and long and deep view of who we are. The Passover, for

example, reminds us that our roots go back through the Eucharist, beyond even the time of Jesus, to the time of Moses and the first Passover. Our roots are deep and long. When we remember the Papal election, when the present Pope took the name "Benedict," he had to line up behind fifteen other Benedicts, and be one of two hundred sixty-five Popes. We have a long, deep and rich history. We also have a future that is wedded to this planet, to this universe, and even beyond that. Talk about many mansions, many rooms, many dwelling places.

But there are some basic things that I think we have to hold onto and that hold us together. Let me suggest just two. One is.... the fancy word for it is "sacrament," that we have the conviction and the experience that God who is invisible, the invisible God, can be pointed out and can be made present and can be met in things that are visible, first of all, in creation itself. The first sacrament of God's presence is Creation. That is why we are so concerned about it, Earth Day and care for the earth, and also why as a Catholic community, we have been into universities and education and science and learning and discovery, because, as St. Thomas Aquinas once said, "To make a mistake about nature is to make a mistake about God." So, we are into learning and re-learning again and again. But the greatest sacrament of the presence of God is in the person of Jesus Christ. And in the Church, we continue to be a sacrament of God's presence, with the high points of Baptism and Eucharist and the word of God in scripture. Sacrament is a basic.

Another basic.... I use the word "people" because in the Second Vatican Council the Church was described not as an institution, but as the people of God, or as a pilgrim people, or as a community of people rooted in Jesus. I read recently, when the question is asked "Are you saved?" the answer from a Catholic should never be "Yes I am saved by Jesus Christ." Never. The Catholic answer is "I belong to a people who are being saved by Jesus Christ," that from the beginning we are called around Jesus to be a people, and we are a people that is broader and richer and larger by far than the Pope and the hierarchy. In recent days, I have heard the comment which is accurate Church teaching, "The Church is not the Pope." We have seen so much on tv that it began to look that way. The Church is not the Pope, but the Church needs the Pope, his ministry, his service, his leadership and his role as center of unity. Those are two basics, sacrament and an entire people, a pilgrim people together, journeying side by side with each other, journeying side by side with our bishops and gifted leaders, journeying side by side with Pope Benedict XVI, side by side, side by side, but doing all that we can to walk hand in hand with the gospel and the person of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.