



The Cross

Pope Benedict's Westminster Cathedral Homily

18 September 2010



About this resource

In his speeches and homilies Pope Benedict XVI left the Church in England and Wales a legacy of reading material for ongoing reflection and prayer. From November 2011 - October 2012 one sheet will be offered monthly to assist deepening our shared appreciation and understanding of what he said.

*Home Mission,
Desk, Catholic
Bishops'
Conference of
England and
Wales*



‘Let us begin with the sacrifice of the Cross. The outpouring of Christ’s blood is the source of the Church’s life. Saint John, as we know, sees in the water and blood which flowed from our Lord’s body the wellspring of that divine life which is bestowed by the Holy Spirit and communicated to us in the sacraments (Jn 19:34; cf. 1 Jn1:7; 5:6-7). The Letter to the Hebrews draws out, we might say, the liturgical implications of this mystery. Jesus, by his suffering and death, his self-oblation in the eternal Spirit, has become our high priest and "the mediator of a new covenant" (Heb 9:15). These words echo our Lord’s own words at the Last Supper, when he instituted the Eucharist as the sacrament of his body, given up for

us, and his blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant shed for the forgiveness of sins (cf. Mk 14:24; Mt26:28; Lk 22:20).’

‘...Our Lord’s hands, extended on the Cross, also invite us to contemplate our participation in his eternal priesthood and thus our responsibility, as members of his body, to bring the reconciling power of his sacrifice to the world in which we live.’

Full text: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Replay-the-Visit/Speeches/Speeches-18-September/Pope-Benedict-s-Westminster-Cathedral-Homily>



FOR REFLECTION

The founder of the Focolare Movement, Chiara Lubich, meditated on Good Friday: “Jesus’ death on the cross is his sublime, divine, heroic lesson on the meaning of love. He had given everything... Three years of preaching, revealing the truth, bearing witness to the Father, promising the Holy Spirit and working all kinds of miracles of love. Three hours on the cross, from which he forgave his executioners, opened heaven to the good thief, gave us his Mother, and finally, his body and blood, after having given

them to us mystically in the Eucharist. Only his divinity remained. Within him love had been annihilated, light extinguished, wisdom silenced. Thus he made himself nothing, to make us partakers in the all that he is... to make us children of God.”

Full text:
http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=27261

How might we signpost and share with others the meaning of the Cross?



SUFFERING



"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life"(27). These words, spoken by Christ in his conversation with Nicodemus, introduce us into the very heart of God's salvific work. They also express the very essence of Christian soteriology, that is, of the theology of salvation. Salvation means liberation from evil, and for this reason it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering. According to the words spoken to Nicodemus, God gives his Son to "the world" to free man from evil, which bears within itself the definitive and absolute perspective on suffering. At the same time, the very word "gives" ("gave") indicates that this liberation must be achieved by the only-begotten Son through his own suffering. And in this, love is manifested, the infinite love both of that only-begotten Son and of the Father who for this reason "gives" his Son. This is love for man, love for the "world": it is salvific love.

We here find ourselves—and we must clearly realize this in our shared reflection on this problem—faced with a completely new dimension of our theme. It is a different dimension from the one which was determined and, in a certain sense, concluded the search for the meaning of suffering within

the limit of justice. This is the dimension of Redemption, to which in the Old Testament, at least in the Vulgate text, the words of the just man Job already seem to refer: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last... I shall see God..."(28). Whereas our consideration has so far concentrated primarily and in a certain sense exclusively on suffering in its multiple temporal dimension (as also the sufferings of the just man Job), the words quoted above from Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus refer to suffering in its fundamental and definitive meaning. God gives his only-begotten Son so that man "should not perish" and the meaning of these words "should not perish" is precisely specified by the words that follow: "but have eternal life".

Man "perishes" when he loses "eternal life". The opposite of salvation is not, therefore, only temporal suffering, any kind of suffering, but the definitive suffering: the loss of eternal life." (14)

"...This is the meaning of suffering, which is truly supernatural and at the same time human. It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission." (31)

Apostolic Letter,

Salvifici Doloris

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_11021984_salvifici-doloris_en.html

Pause to re-read this extract and to reflect.

Redeeming Love

By giving up his own Son for our sins, God manifests that his plan for us is one of benevolent love, prior to any merit on our part."



Catechism of the Catholic Church 604

St John The Apostle

St. John, the son of Zebedee, and the brother of St. James the Great, was called to be an Apostle by Jesus in the first year of His public ministry. He became the "beloved disciple" and the only one of the Twelve who did not forsake Jesus in the hour of His Passion. More: http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=228



The Focolare Movement is an international movement, inspired by the gospel, working for unity in all spheres of life.

For over sixty years it has drawn together people of all Christian traditions and from many of the world's religions, alongside people with no formal faith, who share the aim of building a united world. More: <http://www.focolare.org.uk/>