



Mass of Thanksgiving for the Gift of Pope Benedict XVI

Text of Homily of Archbishop Richard Smith

Embargoed to 12:30 p.m. MT on February 28, 2013

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"*Cooperatores veritatis.*" "Co-operators of the truth." When in 1977 Father Joseph Ratzinger was named Archbishop of Munich and Freising, he chose this phrase as his episcopal motto. It is taken from the Third letter of Saint John, which was proclaimed in part today as our second reading. In that letter Saint John makes clear his love for the truth and the joy that is his when his children, fellow Christians, walk in the truth. When we support one another in our fidelity to the Christian mission, he says, we become "co-operators of the truth", *cooperatores veritatis*. The Holy Father explained the reason for this choice of motto as twofold: first, truth was the link between his former mission as a theologian and the new one entrusted to him as Bishop; second, he saw that the very theme of truth had become practically absent in the world of today, a condition that placed everything in danger of collapse. As now the world looks back over the life of the man who became Pope Benedict XVI, we recognize that we are giving thanks to God today for the gift of one of history's great co-operators of the truth. In the face of what he once famously and memorably labelled the "dictatorship of relativism", the Holy Father dedicated his papacy, as he had consecrated the entirety of his theological and priestly work, to the elucidation of the truth, the truth who is Jesus Christ, for the edification and guidance of the people of God.

Long ago, from the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, God promised to give his people shepherds after his own heart, "who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." That promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who as the Word Incarnate nourished us with the words of everlasting life, and who sent the Holy Spirit from the Father to lead the Church into the understanding of all that he revealed. It falls to the Magisterium of the Church, and to the Successor of Saint Peter in particular, to guide the Church in its appropriation of the truth revealed in Christ, and to hand it on faithfully, so that in every generation God's people are fed with the knowledge and understanding that come from God, and that alone grant sure direction to our lives. In Pope Benedict XVI we have been blessed with an extraordinarily gifted teacher, who in every letter, speech, message and homily of his Petrine ministry has explained the faith in a manner at once intelligible and attractive. This wonderful servant of the truth has taught us, time and again, that the truth is beautiful, and that we must allow ourselves to be embraced by it if we are to be truly free.

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Because he was fully dedicated to the truth he was not afraid to speak it, particularly at times when others were either unwilling or unable to do so. In the halls of government he challenged political leaders not to sever civil legislation from natural law, nor politics from ethics, called on them to uphold freedom of conscience and religion, and invited them to make space in the public square for voices of reason informed by faith. When the world economy entered a crisis in 2008, he was the sole world leader clearly to identify the root of the problem as a crisis of morality, and called for a complete reshaping of the economic order based on love, gratuitousness and human solidarity. In an era when many are sensitive to the need to protect and care for the environment, he agreed but went much farther than most, reminding us that genuine ecological concern must be grounded in the truth of the ecology of man himself. Within the Church, he who played an important role in the shaping of the Second Vatican Council clarified its authentic interpretation. Of particular concern to him was the truth of the sacred liturgy, whose beauty and mystery were the frequent subjects of his discourses. The truth of the Church as a communion led him to reach out to separated Christians with the invitation to reconciliation, while his many and substantive overtures to people of other faiths were impelled by the truth of God's universal salvific will.

Beneath all of this, and inspiring everything he said and wrote, was the truth of Christ's abiding friendship. In his very first homily as our Holy Father, he said: "There is nothing more beautiful than to know Jesus Christ, and to tell others of our friendship with him." This touched me deeply, and has influenced the shape of the new evangelization here in this Archdiocese. The encounter with this love of God, this offer of friendship with Jesus Christ, changes everything. We heard of such an encounter in today's Gospel passage, which recounts the meeting of Jesus with Peter shortly after the resurrection.

Pope Benedict himself commented on this encounter in his general audience of May 24, 2006. There he pointed out that our one English word "love" is used to translate two distinct Greek verbs. The first two times that Jesus poses the question, "Do you love me?" he uses *agapao*, which refers to a total and unconditional love. Jesus begins by asking Peter if he loves him with this kind of total love. However, Peter replies with the verb *fileo*, the love of a friend, implying affection, certainly, but not a total gift of self. In other words, Peter, acutely aware of his recent betrayal and his weakness, tells Jesus that all he can offer is his weak human love. Strikingly, the third time Jesus poses the question he changes the verb and asks "*Fileis me?*" That is to say, "Will you at least love me as you can? I am willing to accept and work with that." Pope Benedict observes how Jesus adapts himself to Peter and not the other way around. The Lord accepts us, as he accepted Peter, where we are, and works in and through our weakness to transform us, strengthen us, and make us true disciples. All he asks is that we love him as we can and leave the rest up to him.

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This, I believe, points to the essence of Pope Benedict's legacy to the Church and the world. Within his corpus of extraordinary teaching is a human heart beating with a profound love for Jesus Christ, his Lord and friend. With his resignation, this Successor of Saint Peter has demonstrated that he, too, is ready to acknowledge his weakness, trusting that Jesus is at work in and through it for the good of the Church. Today we testify that, yes, the Lord has, indeed, done wondrous things through the man we have grown to love and admire as our Holy Father for these past eight years. We are profoundly grateful to God for the blessing that has been given to us in Pope Benedict XVI, and ask the Lord now to fill his heart with the assurance of the love and appreciation of all cooperators of the truth.

Most Reverend Richard W. Smith
Archbishop of Edmonton
February 28, 2013