

5th Sunday of Easter 2008

Fr. Robert VerEecke

Throughout the Lenten Easter Season, a group of parishioners have been reading Fr. Timothy Radcliffe's "What is the point of being Christian". Fr. Radcliffe, an English Dominican who was the head of the order has traveled widely and listened to the experience of Catholic Christians all over the world. In one of these chapters entitled Root Shock, he tries to address the polarization there exists today between so many Catholics; sometimes called conservative and liberal (cafeteria) He does not use this terminology but rather speaks of Communion and Kingdom Catholics. Kingdom Catholics are those who see our faith as primarily a pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. We have Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life to be the road, the wisdom and the energy that moves us toward the Kingdom but we don't have all the answers. We may see Jesus as the one truth but Jesus himself is able to embrace many truths in this complex world. We may see Jesus as the Way but we are more willing to embrace the possibility of other ways to reach the end. We may see Jesus as the life but recognize that others do not find the same life in him as we do. Communion Catholics are those who find our identity in the traditions and truths given to the church and interpreted by the teaching authority of the church, especially the Pope and the bishops. The emphasis tends to be less on a pilgrimage and more on a place, a locus of community in the here and now. Communion Catholics claim Jesus as our Way, our Truth and our Life as well. But for this group of Catholics, Jesus shows the one and only way. Jesus is the one and only truth. Jesus is the only one who gives God's life. The authentic response of a follower of Jesus is to find all the answers that the world needs in the person of Jesus and all he reveals about the Father through the spirit. Fr Radcliffe goes on to say that the Church not only needs Communion and Kingdom Catholics but that every Catholic should have within them some of both so that we can go beyond differences and ideologies and be united by Jesus who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

I mention Fr Radcliffe's attempt to bring Catholic together in a common understanding because of the power of Pope Benedicts' visit this week

This past week we have seen extraordinarily pastoral leadership on the part of Pope Benedict the 16th. He has surprised many with his warmth, his smile, his gentleness. He surprised many with his openness to meeting with victims

of abuse by priests so that he could hear first hand the horrific pain that so many have experienced at the hands of Church's shepherds. He has also surprised many with an unflinching commitment to the truth of Jesus Christ as God's way to salvation but he has done this in a way that has invited others into dialogue. His remarks to ecumenical leaders and those in the Synagogue in NY have expressed a profound human respect for the traditions and beliefs of others. His remarks about the ways of the world come as no surprise. As he said in the homily in Washington DC:

Who can deny that the present moment is a crossroads, not only for the Church in America but also for society as a whole? It is a time of great promise, as we see the human family in many ways drawing closer together and becoming ever more interdependent. Yet at the same time we see clear signs of a disturbing breakdown in the very foundations of society: signs of alienation, anger and polarization on the part of many of our contemporaries; increased violence; a weakening of the moral sense; a coarsening of social relations; and a growing forgetfulness of God. The Church, too, sees signs of immense promise in her many strong parishes and vital movements, in the enthusiasm for the faith shown by so many young people, in the number of those who each year embrace the Catholic faith, and in a greater interest in prayer and catechesis. At the same time she senses, often painfully, the presence of division and polarization in her midst, as well as the troubling realization that many of the baptized, rather than acting as a spiritual leaven in the world, are inclined to embrace attitudes contrary to the truth of the Gospel.

In a very real sense our Holy Father is inviting all of us to enter deeply into the mystery of Communion with each other and keep alive the dream of the kingdom where all are gathered together as One in Christ. We can not be just one or the other. The richness of our tradition embodied in the person of Benedict always asks us to go more into the mystery of God dwelling in our midst.