

Homily for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 6:1-7

1 Peter 2:4-9

John 14:1-12

There are plenty of people around the world who disagree with the pope and with the teachings of the Church he represents.

But last week, hundreds of thousands, even millions of people, including many of his critics, found their hearts touched by Benedict's words and deeds.

How did this man gain access to peoples' hearts?

True enough: as challenging as were some of his remarks, his words were equally comforting and often consoling.

True enough: his deeds, especially meeting with the victims of clergy sexual abuse, were telling and compelling.

But something else was at work in his visit, something more subtle than any of his words and deeds.

Most people recognized in Benedict, a man who truly loves in God;

who wants more than anything else to follow Jesus;

a man who trusts God's Spirit to guide him.

Or, to put it in the words of Peter which we heard in the second reading: in Benedict, people found a man who is:

"ready to give an explanation to any who ask, to give a reason for his hope and to do so with gentleness and reverence."

It's this in Benedict that people of all faiths - and people of no faith - intuit, recognize, appreciate and warm to:

even many, though certainly not all,

who have strong disagreements with him and the Church.

He didn't settle all our disputes; he didn't answer all our questions; he didn't fulfill all our wishes.

He did share his faith and the reason for his hope.

Benedict not only *has* hope;

he *knows* his hope, personally, because his hope *is* Jesus.

And this pope came among us last week to share his hope with gentleness and with reverence for us in our struggles.

When the pope landed at Andrews Air Force Base

he landed with a lot of baggage:

the baggage of 2,000 years of Christian faith

and trunk loads of a heritage passed down to us
by our Jewish ancestors in the faith.
He stepped off the plane as a living icon
of all that has been true and grace-filled in our Catholic history
and he walked down the stairs to the tarmac as a living dart board,
a target for all the anger and hurt and questions
that burden the hearts of God's people.
An icon is an image for prayer and devotion;
a target offers a bull's eye for marksmanship.
Benedict is both – and he knows it. And we know it, too.
Still, he walked among us as a man of hope, hope in Jesus.
He doesn't put his hope in church history, or in church teaching,
or in the office of the papacy.
The only explanation for his hope is in the Word of God,
given to us in Jesus.
I believe what helped so many warm to Benedict's presence
was his reminding us gently, with reverence, over and over again,
of our need for a relationship with God,
for the peace God offers us in Jesus,
and for trust in God's Spirit in our lives.
Benedict reminded us that faith in Jesus is our greatest hope.

And I believe we *wanted* to be reminded of that.

We so easily put our hope in passing things
and there is often precious little in our culture
to lead us to put our hope in Jesus.
But we know, deep in our hearts,
that faith in God is the only reason for our hope
and that trust in Jesus is the greatest hope
that we can hope to have.

For that reason, we gather at this altar to celebrate our faith in Christ
who loves us gently, with reverence for our struggles,
for in the bread and cup of this table we find the reason for our hope
in the body and blood of Jesus... Jesus... Jesus...

***☩ In the morning when I rise... give me Jesus!
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus,
you may have all this world, give me Jesus!***

***☩ In my troubles 'long the way... give me Jesus!
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus,
you may have all this world, give me Jesus!***

***☩ Oh, and when my days are done... give me Jesus!
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus,***

you may have all this world, give me Jesus!

(I ended my homily by singing *Give Me Jesus*, inviting the assembly to join in on the chorus. The verses I sang differ from those in the video above; the singer/guitarist is Justin Adams.)

- Fr. Austin Fleming