

Habemus Papam!

St. Thomas Aquinas, Camas, WA
Fr. Derek Lappe

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Most of you have already had an opportunity to hear some of the reactions from the media and various pundits, faithful and dissident Catholics, talk show hosts etc. over the past week in reaction to the election of Pope Benedict "A"VI, but I would like to take the opportunity to write a few of my thoughts since I won't be able to preach them (I am up in Stevenson this weekend celebrating First Communion).

Before he even offered his first blessing from the Loggia over the crowd gathered to welcome him this pope was already a disappointment for many. There had, apparently, been a great hope on the part of many that the man who would appear at that window would be someone who was going to take the Church in a radically different direction than the course set by pope John Paul. They were bound to be disappointed.

There is, very sadly, a great division in our Church, and a great division in our world which is crystallized in those five hot button issues of abortion, contraception, homosexuality, married priests and women clergy. In the end however, no matter how much time we spend talking about these issues in particular I believe that they are only symptomatic of a deeper question which troubles many modern minds. It is the question of whether God has any say in one's life, in what one does, how one behaves, how one treats others, and ultimately how one loves.

The Church's answer has always been very clear: God is very interested in being intimately involved in every part of our lives, he has in fact become incarnate so that he could enter human history and teach us how to live, how to treat one another, and ultimately how it is that one loves. We believe as Christians that God has revealed to us, and to all who are interested, how it is that one should live and love, and we see ourselves as mandated to proclaim those revealed truths to the world (proposing not imposing). Thus we are convinced of the unique salvific place of Jesus Christ, and the unique place of the Church which he founded in proclaiming the truth of Jesus Christ.

Frankly this is where the problem enters.

Such a claim to Absolute Truth is unbearable to the modern and relativistic mind. And thus to elect a Pope who is absolutely convinced of the Truth, relevance and urgency of the Christian message is an unthinkable step backward in many minds. They were bound to be disappointed. Catholics are Catholics because they believe certain things about God, the world, and the human person-yes the new pope is Catholic. He believes that Jesus Christ is the unique Savior of the World, he believes that Jesus Christ founded a Church, he believes that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit into truth, he believes in the obligation which the Church has to proclaim that truth to the world. Who did they think the cardinals were going to elect?

As we begin to see this pontificate unfold we will be able to see who this man truly is. I can guarantee that you will have a very difficult time reconciling the many epithets hurled against him with the humble, somewhat shy man standing there dressed in white. I have actually met him on a couple of occasions and the only thing noticeable about him is a sort of quiet simplicity which he exudes.

As I told the people at Mass this week, I am extremely happy that he was chosen, but I would have been confident in whomever they elected. I am particularly happy that Pope Benedict was chosen because he is exactly the man for the job. He was the closest collaborator with pope John Paul, and is best able to continue the work of that pontificate. I think as well that the reason he was chosen was because of his interest in the question and problem of Europe where the faith is simply dying. He is probably one of the smartest men in the Church and thus one of the most capable in the difficult conversation with a modern atheistic and relativistic society. He is certainly one of the few left who are the most intimately familiar with the work of the Second Vatican Council and sees himself as called by God to continue the implementation of the Council. The list goes on and on, in the end we should all be confident and joyful because he is the one whom God has called to lead the Church at the beginning of the Third Millennium.

One recommendation I would make to all of you is to pick up and read some of the works of Cardinal Ratzinger to help form your own opinion about the man. Three works particularly

recommend themselves as being most approachable. They are book-length interviews which were published over the past few years. The Ratzinger Report; Salt of the Earth; and God and the World. Each of them makes very interesting reading and gives good insight into the man who is Benedict XVI.

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