



POPE BENEDICT XVI

Archbishop of Canterbury's address at Evening Prayer

Introductory words of his holiness benedict xvi during the evening prayer

Westminster Abbey, Friday, 17 September 2010

Your Holiness, Members of the Collegiate Body, distinguished guests, brothers and sisters in Christ:

Christians in Britain, especially in England, look back with the most fervent gratitude to the events of 597, when Augustine landed on these shores to preach the gospel to the Anglo-Saxons at the behest of Pope St Gregory the Great. For Christians of all traditions and confessions, St Gregory is a figure of compelling attractiveness and spiritual authority – pastor and leader, scholar and exegete and spiritual guide. The fact that the first preaching of the Gospel to the English peoples in the sixth and seventh centuries has its origins in his vision creates a special connection for us with the See of the Apostles Peter and Paul; and Gregory's witness and legacy remain an immensely fruitful source of inspiration for our own mission in these dramatically different times. Two dimensions of that vision may be of special importance as we reflect today on the significance of Your Holiness's visit to us.

St Gregory was the first to spell out for the faithful something of the magnitude of the gift given to Christ's Church through the life of St Benedict – to whom you, Your Holiness, have signalled your devotion in the choice of your name as Pope. In St Gregory's Dialogues, we can trace the impact of St Benedict – an extraordinary man who, through a relatively brief Rule of life, opened up for the whole civilisation of Europe since the sixth century the possibility of living in joy and mutual service, in simplicity and self-denial, in a balanced pattern of labour and prayer in which every moment spoke of human dignity fully realised in surrender to a loving God. The Benedictine life proved a sure foundation not only for generations of monks and nuns, but for an entire culture in which productive work and contemplative silence and receptivity—human dignity and human freedom—were both honoured.

Our own culture, a culture in which so often it seems that 'love has grown cold', is one in which we can see the dehumanising effects of losing sight of Benedict's vision. Work is so often an anxious and obsessive matter, as if our whole value as human beings depended upon it; and so, consequently, unemployment, still a scourge and a threat in these uncertain financial times, comes to seem like a loss of dignity and meaning in life. We live in an age where there is a desperate need to recover the sense of the dignity of both labour and leisure and the necessity of a silent openness to God that allows our true character to grow and flourish by participating in an eternal love.

In a series of profound and eloquent encyclicals, you have explored these themes for our day, grounding everything in the eternal love of the Holy Trinity, challenging us to hope both for this world and the next, and analysing the ways in which our economic habits have trapped us in a reductive and unworthy style of human living. In this building with its long Benedictine legacy, we acknowledge with gratitude your contribution to a Benedictine vision for our days, and pray that your time with us in Britain may help us all towards a renewal of the hope and energy we need as Christians to witness to our conviction that in their relation to God men and women may grow into the fullest freedom and beauty of spirit.

And in this, we are recalled also to the importance among the titles of the Bishops of Rome of St Gregory's own self-designation as 'servant of the servants of God' – surely the one title that points most directly to the example of the Lord who has called us. There is, we know, no authority in the Church that is not the authority of service: that is, of building up the people of God to full maturity. Christ's service is simply the way in which we meet his almighty power: the power to remake the world he has created, pouring out into our lives, individually and together, what we truly need in order to become fully what we are made to be – the image of the divine life. It is that image which the pastor in the Church seeks to serve, bowing down in reverence before each human person in the knowledge of the glory for which he or she was made.

Christians have very diverse views about the nature of the vocation that belongs to the See of Rome. Yet, as Your Holiness's great predecessor reminded us all in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*, we must learn to reflect together on how the historic ministry of the Roman Church and its chief pastor may speak to the Church catholic—East and West, global north and global south of the authority of Christ and his apostles to build up the Body in love; how it may be realized as a ministry of patience and reverence towards all, a ministry of creative love and self-giving that leads us all into the same path of seeking not our own comfort or profit but the good of the entire human community and the glory of God the creator and redeemer.

We pray that your time with us will be a further step for all of us into the mystery of the cross and the resurrection, so that growing together we may become more effective channels for God's purpose to heal the wounds of humankind, and to restore once again both in our societies and our environment the likeness of his glory as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

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