

## *The Encounter*

Homily for January 3, 2023

Today we are remembering Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. When thinking of Pope Benedict this quote from his first encyclical from 2005, *Deus Caritas Est*, captures the theme at the heart of his Papacy and indeed the whole of his intellectual and pastoral life:

***Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Keep that clear, and all will be well; lose sight of it, and nothing else in the long run will really matter.***

What Pope Benedict is saying is that it is our relationship with Jesus that is at the centre of our Christian life. If Jesus is not at the centre then we will lose our perspective on the meaning of our vocation as followers of Jesus.

St John in the readings we have from his Gospel and 1<sup>st</sup> Letter reiterate this theme that to be a Christian is the encounter with an event and a person, Jesus Christ.

St John's stirring words in his first letter affirm that to be a Christian is to know that one day we will fully see Jesus, for when we see him we will be like him for we will see him as he truly is. How lovely to think that for Pope Benedict this encounter that is now being more fully realized. How appropriate to that St John says that there are those who do not know Jesus and that in a world of unbelief we are to continually live as those who stay focused on the one who is at the centre of our lives, Jesus Christ. Through the entirety of his life as an academic, priest, bishop, cardinal and Pope, Benedict continued to lift Jesus higher during an era of increasing skepticism, atheism, dis-interest and apathy in knowing Jesus.

However Benedict showed us that even in an age of increasing disregard for Jesus Christ when we live with Jesus at the centre then with St John the Baptist we are given the privilege of knowing Jesus and making him known to others. That is to those who are receptive to wanting to have a relationship with Jesus. In all of his writings and in the way he lived his life Pope Benedict, like St John the Baptist declared:

***“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World.”***

Now we pray that as Pope Emeritus Benedict is beholding the Lamb of God that words he wrote in the last year are experienced by him:

**“Quite soon, I shall find myself before the final judge of my life. Even though, as I look back on my long life, I can have great reason for fear and trembling, I am nonetheless of good cheer, for I trust firmly that the Lord is not only the just judge, but also the friend and brother who himself has already suffered for my shortcomings, and is thus also my advocate, my ‘Paraclete.’ In light of the hour of judgment, the grace of being a Christian becomes all the more clear to me. It grants me knowledge, and indeed friendship, with the judge of my life, and thus allows me to pass confidently through the dark door of death...” — Benedict XVI**

Rest eternal grant unto Pope Benedict O Lord and may perpetual light shine upon him.