

Fr. Curtis Miller    December 31, 2022—January 1, 2023    Homily for the Solemnity of Mary

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI passed away this morning at the age of 95. He was a brilliant theologian of deep faithfulness, who described himself at his election as a “humble worker in the vineyard of the Lord.” Benedict was shy and gentle. His eight years serving as pope were a challenge. Yet he gave such clear explanations of the faith, like the good teacher he was, helping us to understand what we believe as Catholics and why we believe it.

I was blessed with the opportunity to see him a couple times, in Rome in 2005 and during his visit to the United States in 2008. When I was in Rome in 2005, the Church was observing the conclusion of the Year of the Eucharist. I happened to be present during a special ceremony in which Pope invited children from throughout Italy and the world who had received their First Holy Communion that year to come to the Vatican for a celebration. At the end of the ceremony, children were invited to go up to the microphone and ask the pope questions. One young boy asked, “My teacher tells me that Jesus is in the Eucharist, but how? I can’t see Him!” The pope gently chuckled, then gave a very profound answer:

“No, we cannot see him, but there are many things that we do not see but they exist and are essential. For example: we do not see our reason, yet we have reason. We do not see our intelligence and we have it... We do not see our soul and yet it exists, and we see its effects, because we can speak, think, and make decisions... Therefore, we do not see the very deepest things, those that really sustain life and the world, but we can see and feel their effects. This is also true for electricity; we do not see the electric current, but we see the light.

So it is with the Risen Lord: we do not see Him with our eyes, but we see that wherever Jesus is, people change, they improve. A greater capacity for peace, for reconciliation, is created. Therefore, we do not see the Lord Himself, but we see the effects of the Lord: so we can understand that Jesus is present. And as I said, it is precisely the invisible things that are the most profound, the most important. So let us go to meet this invisible but powerful Lord who helps us to live well.”

The wonderful thing about this answer is that it also provides a challenge: If we are to receive the Eucharist, we must be striving to cooperate with the graces Jesus offers us in the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, to live out the potential for holiness and goodness that He enables.

Pope Benedict preached many times throughout the years on today’s Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God. Here are a few of his thoughts from a couple homilies in 2012 and 2013:

How do we find peace? Our Scripture readings invite us to contemplate the inner peace of Mary. “During the days in which ‘she gave birth to her first-born son’ (*Lk* 2:7), many unexpected things occurred: not only the birth of the Son but, even before, the tiring journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, not finding room at the inn, the search for a place to stay for the night; then the song of the angels, and the unexpected visit of the shepherds. In all this, however, Mary remains even tempered, she does not get agitated, she is not overcome by events greater than herself; in silence she considers what happens, keeping it in her mind and heart, and

pondering it calmly and serenely. This is the interior peace which we ought to have amid the sometimes tumultuous and confusing events of history, events whose meaning we often do not grasp and which disconcert us” (January 1, 2013).

“The first to be swept up by this blessing [of Jesus’ Incarnation] was Mary the virgin, the spouse of Joseph, chosen by God from the first moment of her existence to be the mother of his incarnate Son. She is the “blessed among women” (*Lk* 1:42) – in the words of Saint Elizabeth’s greeting. Her whole life was spent in the light of the Lord, within the radius of his name and of the face of God incarnate in Jesus, the “blessed fruit of her womb.” This is how Luke’s Gospel presents her to us: fully intent upon guarding and meditating in her heart upon everything concerning her son Jesus (cf. *Lk* 2:19, 51).” (January 1, 2012).

In February 2018, Pope Emeritus Benedict responded to an inquiry about how he was spending his retirement. He wrote, “I can only say that, as my physical strength slowly wanes, interiorly I am on a pilgrimage towards Home. It is a great blessing for me to be surrounded, on this last stretch of the way, which sometimes is a bit exhausting, by such love and kindness as I could never have imagined.”

*Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.*

*May he rest in peace. Amen.*

*May his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, rest in peace. Amen.*