

Faith – The Real Crisis

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In 1969, then Father Joseph Ratzinger said in a radio broadcast in Germany: “it seems certain to me that the Church is facing very hard times. The real crisis has scarcely begun. We will have to count on terrific upheavals. But I am equally certain about what will remain at the end: not the Church of the political cult, which is dead already, but the Church of faith.” Prescient as always, Ratzinger was speaking about what then looked like a Church in deep turmoil. Yet he knew that it was only the beginning.

Today, we can see just how right he was – and is.

From his study of the history of religions, he knew that **Catholicism is not based on politics. (Hear, O ye bishops!) That would be to take the route of the socialists.** Neither is Catholicism based on poetry. That is the foundation of many of the world’s religions, which are based on myths. And some religions are based on both politics and myths, as we see in Nazism and Chinese Communism, for example.

Ratzinger knew that **Catholicism is based on faith, a special kind of faith, a supernatural faith that describes the whole grace-filled human response to God’s supernatural revelation. The response is a complete self-surrender of the kind described in the Scriptures.**

On a Sunday earlier this year, for instance, the genius of the Church coupled the story of the afflictions of Job with Jesus’ teaching **about believers having the open trust that is seen in little children.** In fact, Job is like the little child: “The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Job was standing on the truth of God so completely that he exemplified what Saint Theresa of Avila expressed in the words: “God is sufficient.” **Once one is bonded to God completely, then**

everything else is relativized. It is given its relative place in relation to this one, all-consuming relationship. This relationship illuminates every other relationship that we have, every work that we do.

A modern scripture scholar has spelled this out: **“When he believes God, man knows revealed truth through the infallible knowledge God has of himself and consequently shares in the divine consciousness.”** (Juan Alfaro, OSB) The ineffable knowledge that comes through faith is, for teaching purposes, partly reduced to propositions about salvation. But its full scope is to lead us into the mind of Almighty God himself. “Faith is a divinizing, supernatural participation in the very life of God.”



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That is what Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) was pointing to in his broadcast. **That participation is going to get the Church, or some remnant of it, through every vicissitude. The truly faithful men or women are going to stay the course because they have thrown themselves completely into the hands of God.** They are like the child in the Gospel who is standing in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

To the justly gloomy picture of our times – if one is not completely surrendered to Christ – Ratzinger added: “To put this more positively: **The future of the Church, once again as always, will be reshaped by saints, by men (women), that is, whose minds probe deeper than the slogans of the day, who see more than others see, because their lives embrace a wider reality.**”

We must have constant recourse to the saints. They are with us at every Mass. We are potentially of their company. Of course, they are glorious in Heaven while we struggle along here on earth. The point that Ratzinger was making is that each of the saints once lived on earth. It was here that faith became so vital to them.

They too saw crises, but against the backdrop of the Crucifixion and what came three days later. They see our crises against the backdrop of the prayer of Saint Monica, the majesty of the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the drama of Saint Maximilian Kolbe in the camp. Just beyond the Cross, there is glory, won for us and guaranteed.

Ratzinger’s suggestion for a personal strategy? Straight out of the Gospel, he finds that **“unselfishness, which makes men free, is attained only through the patience of small daily acts of self-denial. By this daily passion, which alone reveals to a man in how many ways he is enslaved by his own ego, by this daily passion and by it alone, a man’s eyes are slowly opened.”** Our eyes are thus opened to the wider reality that only faith can give.

Even amidst the crises in the Church, we should remain acutely aware of what lies beyond them – a place to which many current Church leaders do not seem to be leading us. Just now, violence is a

daily occurrence, and the virus afflicts many, but we still have our little and crucial freedoms. We can still do acts of charity. We can still pray. More and more of us can go to Mass. We can, in the proper times and seasons, speak out on issues that need the Catholic faith to be properly understood.

In short, even now, despite all challenges and disappointments, let us remember on this All Saints Day: we, too, can become saints!

***Image:** *Christ on the Cross Adored by Eight Saints of the Dominican Order* by Abraham van Diepenbeeck, 1652 [Louvre, Paris]

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