

EVS Closing Mass
13th Sunday of the Year
July 1 2012
Bishop Donal McKeown

In a number of his trips abroad this year, Pope Benedict has tried to address the widespread experience of crisis in our society and how Church, itself marked by much disillusionment, might renew its call to generate energising hope. This is the Church's context for all our work of renewal and vocations work.

Firstly, he is clear that both Church and state are experiencing a time of profound crisis. As jails and mental hospitals fill up, many in society are paying a high price for this mix of social, personal and economic fragility marked by *"the inconstancy and fragmentation of many people's lives and in an exaggerated individualism"*.

In terms of Church, he is quite open that religious belief in general and the Catholic Church in particular are in a period of structural, mission and intellectual crisis.

But he sees this as a crisis, not primarily of structures but of faith. In Germany, the Pope said that some Christians see *"the Church merely as an institution, without letting it touch their hearts, or letting the faith touch their hearts."* If they focus on just the outward form of Church, then it will be rejected by those people *"when their 'dream church' fails to materialise."*

Secondly, in response to this situation, Pope Benedict is clear that the Church should not seek to regain its power in European societies. Indeed, loss of Church goods or privilege can actually be a great liberation for Church. After all, it is not there to compete for status with other power blocs in society. Its ministry is to purify reason.

However, religion can still play an essential role in the creation of a modern society. Referring to the fact that large parts of Germany had known Nazi and Marxist dictatorships in the 20th century, he underlined how ideology without God, and political agendas without a sense of human dignity are inhuman. If religion needs freedom, freedom also needs religion.

Thirdly, despite the fact that Church is entitled to be a key partner in building a society worthy of human beings, Pope Benedict insists that the Church *'will need again and again to set herself apart from her surroundings, to become in a certain sense "unworldly"'*. Christ came among us *"not merely to confirm the worldliness and to be its companion, leaving it to carry on just as it is, but in order to change it"*. Its liturgy, beliefs and practices should clearly reinforce how it is different from other social partners.

Fourthly, Church renewal – according to Pope Benedict – will be based not merely on a simple managerial or structural paradigm, but solely by leading people to Christ. This is a work of grace and of profound discernment. There is no future based on following the passing preoccupations of a Western society that is itself in cultural crisis

In the context of ecumenism, he did not propose any major structural or symbolic leap forward. He underlined that Church unity will not be built merely on the foundations of intellectual bargaining and agreement. Christian unity will be God's work, not ours.

This is all linked to a strong sense of the Church as a core part of God's presence in the world. Following Jesus in faith means walking at his side in the communion of the Church. *"We cannot follow Jesus on our own. Anyone who would be tempted to do so "on his own", or to approach the life of faith with that kind of individualism so prevalent today, will risk never truly encountering Jesus, or will end up following a counterfeit Jesus."* (Madrid)

In this context, our Gospel today gives us some simple messages.

1. Even in Jesus' time, doubt and uncertainty was widespread.
 - a. People who arrive to say that the child is dead. (Why trouble the Master?)
 - i. But Jesus continues – taking a small group.
 - b. At the house, he says that the child is not dead
 - i. They laugh
 - ii. But he continues with his small group

The question of the transcendent will always make people feel uncomfortable. Many fear hoping.

2. Jesus continues his work with a small group
 - a. Peter, James and John – little groups of disciples
 - b. and with parents – the family that initially gave life.

Belonging is part of believing. Community is not just the context for evangelisation. It is a core part of the context.

3. Jesus is aware that the miracle could create false ideas about the Messiah. (cf temptations)
 - a. It is important to speak the truth
 - b. But it is important how and when to speak the truth
 - i. It is essential to speak the truth only in love.
 - c. But we need to know the story that we have to tell

It is important to be as wise as serpents and as gentle as doves.

In a world, threatened by fragmentation – communal and personal – we seek to offer the healing of Jesus by showing that

- We can build a community of faith and of journey
- We have a testimony – the history of salvation
- We have a mission

The Eucharist is the place where those come together in Jesus

- We are bonded together as community
- We hear the Good News
- And we are nourished for mission

Jesus left us the Eucharist as a memorial of his action and not just of his presence. If we celebrate the Eucharist as action he will be able to use us to call people to become the people that God dreams they can be, and set the world on fire.