

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time B

### 8 February 2009

I think that by now we all know that we are in the middle of the **Jubilee Year of St Paul** – the Icon of him here in front of the ambo reminds us of that every week!

Pope Benedict XVI called for this special celebration **not only** in honor of Paul's 2008th birthday, which is a good reason in itself.

But he had a **deeper reason** too.

- ? He recognizes that the world **today** is continuing to make the **same mistake** that the world has been making for the last two hundred years:
- ? Too many of our cultural, political, and economic **leaders** are trying to build a stable, just, and prosperous global society **without acknowledging our dependence on God**.
- ? This is what is called **secularism**.
- ? It is a **constant temptation** for every individual and society, and many of **last century's tragedies** flowed from falling into it.
- ? The injustices of **Soviet Communism**, the destruction of two **World Wars**, the genocides and massacres flaring up on every continent...
- ? These resulted from human societies trying to **build themselves up** without building on the **solid foundation** of faith in and obedience to **Christ** and his teachings, the God of wisdom, mercy, and peace.

Pope Benedict doesn't want **our century** to make the same mistake.

- ? And so he is setting before every Catholic the **shining example of St Paul**, who courageously dedicated his entire life to **spreading the gospel to all peoples**, in spite of suffering, persecution, and rejection.
- ? Pope Benedict knows that if **every Catholic** decided to **follow that example** in their own lives, then the Church would once again fulfill its **critical mission** of being the **salt of the earth** and the **light of the world**.
- ? That is what we are **for**; it is our primary **mission** in life, every single one of us.
- ? Our **motto** must be **the same** as the one St Paul wrote in today's Second Reading: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

Here is what Pope Benedict said as he declared this special year in honor of St. Paul:

"Dear brothers and sisters, as in early times, today too Christ needs apostles ready to sacrifice themselves. He needs witnesses and martyrs like St Paul. Paul, a former violent persecutor of Christians, when he fell to the ground dazzled by the divine light on the road to Damascus, did not hesitate to change sides to the Crucified One and followed him without second thoughts. He lived and worked for Christ, for him he suffered and died. How timely his example is

today! And for this very reason I am pleased to announce officially that we shall be dedicating a special Jubilee Year to the Apostle Paul.”

*Pope Benedict XVI, First Vespers for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul, 28 June 2007.*

“...an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it!” What’s the “it” that St. Paul is talking about? It’s the TRUTH!

I need very much to tell you about a particular Truth that our world has forgotten – the Truth that evil exists in the world – that the devil and his demons are “prowling about the world seeking the ruin of souls.” Doubt me? Just look around!

In every corner of the world – and in every corner of our own lives – the devil and his demons are trying – and succeeding – in bringing ruin to our souls – to the life of God’s Grace within us. The worst thing we could possibly do – would be to ignore or even deny the fact that the Devil is at work – even now – that we are in the midst of a great and terrible war – a war that has eternal consequences!

Our task on earth, revealed by St. Paul today in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading – is to restore the Truth – to restore the Truth about who God is, to recapture the proper understanding of who we are, and open ourselves to receive God’s Grace – so as to live forever in Heaven.

But let’s set the stage on which we live: We all know the story, Eve is tempted and together she and Adam eat the “forbidden fruit.” The battle has begun – and that battle continues in our lives – every day. We want the “forbidden fruits” because we no longer believe in the Truth – we no longer simply assent to what God teaches us – to what Jesus taught us – to what the Church (the Body of Christ) teaches. Instead, we want to “taste the forbidden fruits.” The Devil’s tactics may have changed over 1000’s of years, but the core motive has not – turn them away from God!

Satan has a secret. It is the secret about the three primary ways he seeks to destroy us. If Satan can convince our culture to adopt the way of thinking that these secret strategies bring with them, then he can brainwash our children, disrupt our families, manipulate our culture, and ruin the Church.

All the problems that we see today in society and in our church can be traced to these three fundamental strategies. It is the basis of the politically correct movement and of the heresy of individualism. These strategies are the fuel that powers radical feminism, the engine that drives liberalism, and the source of the post-modern worldview that dominates our world today and that even contaminates areas of the Church.

Want to know the three secrets? Because of time, I can only tell you one of them (we’ll have to deal with the others in another homily). The secret lie is this: that all opinions are equal. This

is the *modus operandi* of today's world. Each person's opinion has the same dignity, deserves the same respect, and is equally as valid as any other opinion.

This is a demonic lie. It is what Pope Benedict called the "dictatorship of relativism."

It is a demonic lie because genuine opinion is necessarily related to the virtue of Truth. Objective and fundamental truths are either true or they are not; they cannot be both true and untrue at the same time. Since issues of faith and morals relate to objective Truth, varying opinions about such issues **cannot** be equal. In fact, some opinions are silly, some are better than others, and some are just plain wrong.

Honest opinion seeks to know the truth and to express it. To know the truth we must know the One who is the Truth: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life*" declares Jesus, and through this Truth we shall find freedom—freedom from sin and freedom from the slavery of our limited understandings.

To rely upon God for understanding is to submit our will and our opinions to the wisdom and understanding of God. Our opinion can never be equal with God and thus our notion of truth cannot be discerned except through God. To fool ourselves into thinking otherwise, into thinking we can assert an opinion contrary to God's "opinion" is utter arrogance and foolishness.

Let me put it this way. You are in a taxi and the taxi crashes breaking your leg. A bone is protruding from your leg. On the scene are the taxi driver who barely knows first aid and a passerby who happens to be an orthopedic surgeon. Whose "opinion" has precedence over how your leg will be treated? Does the taxi driver have an equal opinion to the orthopedic surgeon? Does the taxi driver even have a right to an opinion?

The taxi driver trying to assert a contrary opinion against the orthopedic surgeon's professional expertise is utter arrogant foolishness; and to accept the taxi driver's opinion over the surgeon's risks losing your leg or even your life.

Yet even in obvious situations like the case of the taxi driver, or when discussing the equally obvious objective Truth taught by the Church, some in the midst of the argument will innocently say (usually to politely dismiss someone who will not listen), "Well, let's just agree to disagree." We cannot do this when the issue is a fundamental truth – like the priority of the respect and preservation of life over all other issues in an election.

If we are talking about PC's versus MACs we can agree to disagree, or preferences of apples over oranges we can agree to disagree, though I think the opinion in favor of MACs is misguided and I personally prefer oranges. But if we are talking about dogma, about the definitive teaching of the Church, about objective truth, there can be no "agree to disagree."

To "agree to disagree" with error is to grant to that error a false recognition that it is somehow on the same level of dignity as the Truth. Error is never on the same level of dignity with Truth.

Error has no dignity except as a possible motivator to lead us to the Truth that we missed. But if we are not confronted in our error, how can we be motivated to move toward Truth?

Christ calls us to truth, even when it hurts. Certainly Christ calls us to gentleness, and civility, but never at the expense of truth. Even when tough love has to be applied it is designed to make it clear to the sinner the seriousness of his actions. Parents, YOU understand this as you discipline your children! The sinner needs to know the risk he takes with his soul. The "tough love" is exercised always in hope that the sinner will return to the Truth.

We do no favors to wayward souls by enabling their errors with our false civility any more than we do a favor to a child who deserves an "F" on a term paper, but receives an "A" for fear we might hurt his feelings.

Like St. Paul, we must proclaim the Fullness of the Truth. To do that we need to understand that Satan is ALIVE AND WELL – working in our lives – prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking the ruin of souls. And ONE way that he works is by convincing us that everyone's opinion is the same. It is not!

Satan had a secret. Now that you know one of his secrets, his scheme and strategy to destroy our children, our families, our culture, and our Church, **what are you going to do? St. Paul preached and proclaimed the Truth.** What will you do? Be "nice" and not correct others – or bring them the Truth?

We need to **actively spread the gospel** to those around us. We do this in **three ways**. First, by our **example**.

- ? This doesn't **add** anything to our normal to-do list, but it affects **how** we accomplish everything we do.
- ? When we **treat others** with respect, kindness, and patience,
- ? When we fulfill our **responsibilities** attentively and lovingly,
- ? When our **way of life** reflects the humility, elegance, simplicity, and joy of Jesus and Mary,
- ? Then we become **living advertisements** of how the gospel can give **meaning and beauty** to life.

Second, we spread the Gospel by our **words**.

- ? There are times when **someone** in our lives, maybe a family member or team member, a friend, a colleague, or even a stranger, needs to **hear about Jesus Christ** and his message of salvation – maybe because their "opinion" is simply opposed to the Truth.
- ? We should **always be ready** to speak to them about Christ and the Truth,
- ? not **pounding people over the head** with the Bible,
- ? but sharing with them the **knowledge that God has given us**, knowing that it will help them **more** than anything else.

Third, we spread the Gospel by **our deeds**.

- ? This means developing and using our **God-given talents** to **benefit our neighbors**,
- ? choosing careers and jobs that are **positive**,
- ? dedicating time to **teach and serve** those in need,
- ? and even, if God calls us, putting **all our eggs in Christ's basket** through a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life and dedication to a life of celibacy, as we talked about last week.

“...I preach the gospel... [because] an obligation has been imposed on me, and woe to me if I do not preach it! I have made myself a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible... to save at least some. All this I do for the sake of the gospel, so that I too may have a share in it.”

Do you want a share in the salvation the Gospel offers? Then preach the gospel by living your life in conformity to God's Truth – not the world's.