

Being Catholic Today

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Final Lecture: SPREADING THE WORD

Being Catholic today means:

1. Faith as a personal encounter with the risen Christ

May your understanding come to full development, until you really know God's secret, Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are found...In his body lives the fullness of divinity. (Col 2:2-3, 9).

The Church in America must speak increasingly of Jesus Christ, the human face of God and the divine face of man. It is this proclamation that truly makes an impact on people, awakens and transforms hearts, in a word, converts. (John Paul II, *The Church in America* (1999) 67).

The Christian faith, as we know, is not born from the acceptance of a doctrine but from the encounter with a Person, with Christ, dead and Risen...And it is more important than ever that the men and women of our age know and encounter Jesus, and also, thanks to our example, allow themselves to be won over by him. (Benedict XVI, Easter Monday 2007)

2. Sharing in the life of the Trinity

The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, "Abba, Father." (Gal 4:6)

It is in Christ, dead and risen, and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, given without measure, that we have become sharers of God's inmost life. Jesus Christ, who "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God", makes us, in the gift of the Eucharist, sharers in God's own life. (Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007) 8)

3. Adhering to the Church as the sacrament of Christ

God has gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and has established them as the Church, that for each and all she may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity. (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 9)

4. Living fraternal communion in the Church

It was as high priest that he made this prophecy that Jesus was to die for the nation—and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God. (John 11:51-52)

The multitude of believers was one heart and one soul. (Acts 4:32)

5. Drawing strength from the Eucharist

The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. Jesus "draws us into himself." The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of "nuclear fission," to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all." (SC 11)

6. A mission to transform the world in the Spirit of Christ

The presence of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit are events capable of engaging every cultural reality and bringing to it the leaven of the Gospel. (SC 78)

7. The proclamation of Catholic orthodoxy as an invitation

Orthodoxy would have a brilliant future if it were represented with a more cheerful face. (Avev Dulles, *First Things*, Aug/Sep 2006)

8. Nurturing faith with prayer

Contemplation is not a privilege reserved to the few; on the contrary, in parishes, in communities and movements there is a need to foster a spirituality clearly oriented to contemplation of the fundamental truths of faith: the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, the Redemption of humanity, and the other great saving works of God. (*The Church in America* 29)

Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed...In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. (Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) 36)

9. A recovery of the spirit of repentance

The loss of a consciousness of sin always entails a certain superficiality in the understanding of God's love. (SC 20)

10. Deepening our understanding of the faith

The situation today points to an ever-increasing urgency for a *doctrinal* formation of the lay faithful, not simply in a better understanding which is natural to faith's dynamism but also in enabling them to "give a reason for their hoping" in view of the world and its grave and complex problems. (John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (1988) 60)

11. Valuing the sacraments as means of growth

By receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ we become sharers in the divine life in an ever more adult and conscious way. (SC 70)

12. Sharing with others the joy we have found in Christ

There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him...What the world needs is God's love; it needs to encounter Christ and to believe in him...Truly, nothing is more beautiful than to know Christ and to make him known to others. (SC 84)

Let your light shine before men. (Matt 5:16)

Conclusion:

It is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to a faith which is conscious and personally lived. The renewal of faith will always be the best way to lead others to the Truth that is Christ. (*The Church in America* 73)