

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR 18th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

In April 2005 Benedict XVI became Pope. In his previous job as head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith he was known by many as a fierce defender of the faith, God's Rottweiler, after his name Ratzinger. To some his calling to be Pope was a shock and a worry. But Cardinal Ratzinger did his job as he saw the Pope (John Paul II) wanted him to and to the best of his abilities, in obedience and humility.

So it was a shock to many when his first encyclical (letter) to the Church was called *Deus Caritas Est*, God is love. Why do I mention this today?

Because in his letter he speaks about Christ's purpose here among us. In the Old Testament God's love is spoken about but often in a general way, if at all.

Benedict XVI says that the arrival of Jesus Christ combines, or fulfils, the message of the Old and now the New, uniting them in Christ. The core purpose of Jesus Christ coming as God, is to show us that it is God himself who comes in search of the "stray sheep, "a lost and suffering humanity." It's good for us to pause for a moment and reflect on this. How often do we feel that we are running to Jesus but finding him elusive? Our efforts are not enough. But stop and let Jesus find us. It is not about our efforts. The Pope asks us to pause and think of that moment when the lance pierces Jesus' side confirming his death, and God's self-offering in love for us.

The Pope says that it is from there that our definition of love must begin. So all that Christ does is out of love for us and to unite in God's endless love. Like a parent finding a lost child, possibly simply one returning home after a journey or time elsewhere, or lost in a crowd, an accident, a disaster, fearing the worst and then clasping the loved child to themselves.

It is this overwhelming love and from that his visible compassion that we see his actions and also his parables.

Before his passion that ends in the lance, he calls his disciples together at the Last Supper, sharing, so significantly, in the Passover meal, which celebrates God's saving his people in the Old Testament. Jesus now reveals how this love will be experienced with his people after his death. And so we have the Eucharist, our Mass.

But in the way he takes the bread, his body, the wine as his blood, and then shares it, he makes it clear that this is a love which was always there in the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament, now becomes the twofold commandment of love of God and love of our neighbour. That God's love is for us and for us to share in together.

In today's gospel, which prepares the apostles for the Eucharist, we see that it begins with Jesus' speaking/ praying with and to his Father in that desolate place in preparation. From this comes an example of his great compassion, in the sharing of this small amount of food in a miracle of nourishment, of life, and of love.

When Pope Francis was Archbishop of Buenos Aires he demanded that his young priests go out into the barrios, the slums, to serve the people. Whenever he came to visit they held a Mass with people clamoring to see what was going on, and to take part. Whatever the number, it was a lesson learnt from our gospel today, to love and have compassion, especially for the poor, those in need, those outcast by society.