**THE MESSAGE OF THE RECTOR MAJOR**

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**THERE IS MUCH MORE “THIRST FOR GOD”**

**THAN WE THINK**

Today, there is a great need to listen, to dialogue freely and candidly, to have personal encounters which are free of judgment and condemnation, as well as a great need for *silence and presence in God*.

Dear friends and readers of the *Salesian Bulletin* of Don Bosco,

In harmony and communion with Don Bosco himself, I am writing both to those who already feel at home with his charism and also to those who want to get to know St. John Bosco and learn more about what is done in Jesus’ Name, in the style of this great “Father and Teacher of Youth.”

By Divine Providence, it happens that just an hour ago I attended the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. One year after beginning his service as Pontiff, he wrote the magnificent encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*. In it, there is this statement that seems to me to be the very essence of the magnificent fragrance of Christian thought: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Certainly, that Person is Jesus Christ.

Benedict XVI elaborates further on this thought, with other statements like these[[2]](#footnote-2):

* Jesus Christ is the Personified Truth who attracts the world to himself.
* The light that shines out from Jesus is the splendour of the truth. Every other truth is a fragment of the Truth that he is, and refers to him.
* Jesus is the Pole Star of human freedom: without him it loses its sense of direction, for without the knowledge of the truth, freedom degenerates, becomes isolated and is reduced to sterile arbitration.
* With him, freedom is rediscovered, it is recognized to have been created for our good and is expressed in charitable actions and behaviour.
* Therefore, Jesus gives men and women total familiarity with the truth and continuously invites them to live in it.
* And nothing succeeds as well as love for the truth in impelling the human mind towards unexplored horizons.
* Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of the truth, draws to himself the heart of each person, enlarges it and fills it with joy.

In a few solid, profound sentences, there is an entire Christian teaching that is far from being “moralism,” i.e., cold and rigid rules devoid of life. Christian life is above all a *true encounter with God*.

That is why I have stated in the title of this essay that, in my opinion, a deeply-held conviction, there is much more “thirst for God” than we imagine or seems to exist. Certainly, I do not intend to alter the statistics found in sociological studies or create a fictitious scenario. I do, however, want to make it clear that in the face-to-face encounter with the real life of so many people – fathers, mothers, families, adolescents, and young adults – what one very often finds is a life that is not easy and must be tended to daily. Human relationships in which love is both desired and necessary must be cultivated in every little gesture, every little detail, and every action. Face to face like that, there is a great need to listen, to dialogue freely and candidly, to have personal encounters free of judgment and condemnation, as well as a great need for *silence and presence in God*.

I say this with great conviction. Right here in Valdocco, where I am now, I am surprised and filled with joy when a group of young people takes the initiative to invite others for an hour of presence, silence, and prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, i.e., for an hour of Eucharistic adoration and a hundred – so many of them young – respond to the appointment. At Sacro Cuore in Rome, we would meet on Thursday nights and young people, young marrieds – some with their babies – and other couples would also be present because they felt that their lives needed this encounter with a Person who gives meaning to our lives.

What I have cited here in one or two examples, I have experienced in very many places and countries. For this reason, I am inviting us in this essay to do exactly what Don Bosco would do. He did not hesitate for a moment to offer his boys the experience of encountering Jesus. That God who is Presence, who is God-with-us, as we have just celebrated at Christmas, continues to be the same One who calls, who invites, who gives peace in each personal encounter, in each moment of rest in him. It is still Jesus who wants to meet all of us, and many others, today. Could we be ashamed and afraid to walk this path? Is it perhaps the case that many of us do not dare to invite others to experience what we live and what has been so freely given to us and offered to us? Is it not the case that since people say that this is not fashionable, or is old-fashioned and obsolete, that we believe these negative messages and lack the courage to give witness that some of us, or perhaps many of us, continue to enjoy each personal encounter with him who is the Lord of Life?

Pope Emeritus Benedict, who has left us, was convinced that his life and his faith were precisely for the grand purpose of encountering his Lord. This is how Pope Francis said farewell to him, with these final words of his homily: “Benedict, faithful friend of the Bridegroom, may your joy be complete as you hear his voice, now and forever!”

Friends, let us continue promoting these encounters with him who is Life, who gives us profound life – since there is more “thirst for God” than what is spoken of, than what people would have us believe.

1. Pope Benedict XVI, [*Deus Caritas Est*](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html)*,* no. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pope Benedict XVI, Address [To the participants of the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (February 10, 2006) | BENEDICT XVI (vatican.va)](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060210_doctrine-faith.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)