

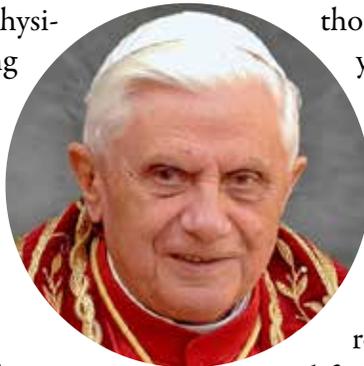
IN ONE OF HIS EARLIER theological works, Cardinal Ratzinger has a reflection on the question of what it is that ails modern man. Modern man seems to be suffering not only from the common characteristics of the effects of Original Sin; there seems to be something more, something peculiar to our period of history. If we attempt to look a little below the surface at how many in the modern world perceive their existence and how they experience life, we find many going through life burdened with a considerable amount of anxiety and discontent. One often finds, when one looks a little deeper, a kind of quiet desperation; an inner gnawing sense of futility. There is also a fair amount of anger and inner rebellion in the face of the world's injustices and sufferings. One often perceives in peoples' souls a deep unrest and agitation. These characteristics are not confined to those who do not have the Catholic faith; one finds them also among those who profess to be believing and practicing Christians.

“Do you like yourself? Do you like who you are? Are you at peace with yourself? Are you at one with yourself? Are you full of gratitude and joy at your existence?”

In reflecting on this situation and looking for their deeper roots, Cardinal Ratzinger points to something that, at first sight, might seem a bit surprising. He sees as one of the significant roots of what ails modern man, man's alienation from himself: Do you like yourself? Do you like who you are? Are you at peace with yourself? Are you at one with yourself? Are you full of gratitude and joy at your existence? From my own inner experience and from working with many souls, I have come to see how common a lack of proper self-worth is; how common a lack of proper and healthy self-love is. It is not uncommon to find a kind of self-hatred in people. If this is not something we ourselves experience, it may be that we see it in others around us. With a little reflection, it is not difficult to see that such an inner attitude towards oneself is a major obstacle in one's relationship to God and to other people. If we see nothing of worth or very little of worth in ourselves, how can we believe in God's love for us. If we lack a proper self-love, the

foundations for entering into communion with another are missing.

If this is, in fact, a major factor in man's inability to live a life of communion with God and with others, what then is the solution to the problem? If we see that this is something we ourselves experience what would be the way forward to address the problem? Here, Cardinal Ratzinger, makes one of his key points: This is not something that anyone can correct by his **own** efforts. On our own, we cannot come to terms with ourselves. We cannot fix ourselves. We can only come to a proper self-love if we have first been loved **by someone else**. As one spiritual author puts it, our self image comes to us through the eyes of others. Our parents not only give us physical birth, they are responsible for giving us a kind of psychological birth. In order to be whole individuals, we need someone to look at us and say: "It is good that you exist." That is what it means to be loved: for someone to look at us and say with conviction: "It is good that you exist!"



So we might be tempted to say that the solution to man's alienation from himself is simply love; love is the solution to the problem. But a little further reflection shows that this is not the case. As Cardinal Ratzinger writes:

"We come now to the all-important question: Is it true, then, when someone says to me: "It is good that you exist"? Is it really good? Is it not possible that that person's love, which wills my existence, is just a tragic error? If the love that gives me courage to exist is not based on truth, then I must, in the end, come to curse the love that deceives me, that maintains in existence something that were better destroyed."

So love alone is not sufficient. We also need to be convinced of the truth of the statement that it is good that we exist. Love without truth would be empty and worthless.

This is where the great Paschal Mystery of Christ comes in. During this season, we have been contemplating the heart of the Paschal Mystery: the suffering, death and resurrection of the Son of God. In this greatest of His interventions and saving acts in human history, God manifests to us our worth in His eyes. This is the event, more than any other, where we

see the truth of our worth. In His passion and death, voluntarily chosen and embraced, Christ is revealing to us, not in words, but in costly deeds, our surpassing worth in God's eyes. This is the divine revelation of love that set the world on fire in the early centuries of Christianity and continues to do so now, one soul at a time.

By His Paschal Mystery, Christ has brought us the redemption we are longing for. His redemption offers the only solution to the alienation from ourselves that we experience. But, on further reflection, the nature of Christ's redemption can perhaps also be the source of difficulties for us. This question of the nature of Christ's redemption is something that I've thought about and puzzled over down the years. I don't know about yourselves, but very often when I get up in the morning, I don't feel particularly redeemed. When I get up in the morning, I probably don't *look* particularly redeemed either. And I recognize many areas of my soul that are still in need of further redemption. For the last 38 years of my life I have lived in various religious communities of the Catholic Church; and though my experience in these communities has been overwhelmingly positive, still, I can't help but notice that no matter where I go, and no matter with whom I live, there are always problems of one sort or another; there are always troubles and conflicts; there are always misunderstandings and hurt feelings. I imagine you all have had the same sort of experience. Even among those who are striving to live good Christian lives, there are all kinds of trials and hardships. And so all this might leave us asking ourselves: Where is Christ's redemption? If He has come to redeem us where do we see the effects of His redemption? If Christ has really redeemed us why does there continue to be so much suffering and evil in the world? It seems to me that this is, in some ways, one of the objections that the modern world makes to Christianity. The modern world basically says: Christianity has had 2,000 years in which to show us Christ's redemption, and we see little evidence for it.

This is another problem that Pope Benedict XVI has given some thought to, and I think what he has to say on the subject can be very helpful. What the Holy

Father says, in effect, is this: When Christ came into the world to bring us redemption, He didn't come to bring us freedom from trials and hardships; He didn't come to bring us freedom from all our anxieties; and He didn't come to bring us freedom from all pain and suffering. So what *did* He come to bring us? *What He came to bring us was God.* His redemption brought us the ability of uniting our souls to God. And the really strange thing is that, somehow, we're not satisfied with this. We want something more than God; God isn't enough for us. But we were made for God; human nature is hard-wired for God and so there is no greater need than our need for God.

The modern world and modern psychology will tell you about all kinds of things that you absolutely must have to live a full and happy life: You need good health and you need all kinds of material possessions

and money, and you need to overcome your anxieties and your feelings of guilt, and the list goes on—But what about the human heart's need for God? Is that not really our greatest need, the only really essential and important need? If we have God, we have everything; if we have everything except God, we have nothing. Christ is risen. He is alive. He is with us and it is only through Him that we have access to the Father.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 16-18). ❖

Note: Our next issue will be in September.
Thank you for all of your prayers and support!