

Lithuania Priests

Talk 1

Two strands: 1. Vatican Two, CCC, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Year of Faith. 2. Excitement with election of Francis. Like 1958. Elements of truth in both: building on legacy and NEW BREATH OF HOLY SPIRIT.

Exciting time to be a Christian, to be a Catholic. 50 Years since Vatican Two, Year of Faith, election of Pope Francis. Let's begin with the latest, Pope Francis:

1. The first ever Latin American Pope.
2. The first non-European Pope for 1,300 years.
3. The first Pope to take a totally new name for 1,100 years.
4. The first ever Jesuit Pope

[The first Pope to have had close friendship with a Jewish Rabbi (John Paul II was first to have had a close Jewish friend). The first Pope to have had close relationships with Pentecostal and free church pastors.]

2013 in some respects like 1958: a new Pope with a very different and popular style, a Pope with a vision for renewal; crowds at audiences; huge hopes and enthusiasm released around the world – counter to image of disinterest in Church, of disgust with Church; it is like many deeply want a Church to admire (while another part of them wants a Church to criticize), enthusiasm and interest not just among Catholics (huge interest among Evangelical Christians)

Moment of great opportunity for the Church, for us as priests. Would be very wrong to dismiss this interest and enthusiasm as superficial or insincere.

But it is a big challenge to us – coming from Pope Francis

- Name chosen as Francis is man of poverty and man of peace
- Go out to peripheries and extremities (social, cultural, religious)
- Carrying the odour of the sheep (pastors close to the people)
- Purified of self-referential church
- Jesus-focused and Spirit-led: don't be afraid of the Holy Spirit: surprises
- Walking together: Pope and bishops, bishops and priests, priests and people
- Mercy of God: "Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversion. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (v. 11). Ah! Brothers and Sisters, God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience he has with each one of us? That is his mercy. He always has patience, patience with us, he understands us, he waits for us, he does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to him with a contrite heart." (Mar 17).
- Church of the Poor for the Poor

Renewal requires and produces integration:

- In each one of us; integration of rational-intellectual, emotional, spiritual
- In Church life; of theology, liturgy, prayer, action
- When I went to seminary in 1958, liturgy was separated from prayer-devotion; theology separated from biblical studies; dogma, moral, ascetical all separated from each other, as well as from Catholic social teaching; Mariology separated from Christology, etc.

One of greatest achievements of John Paul II is to have effected a massive Catholic synthesis:

Integrating study of the Scriptures with systematic theology, with morals and with social teaching.

Example: Beginning moral encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* with example of the rich young man (Matt 19: 16) and ending with section having a teaching on martyrdom as the apex of Christian discipleship (VS 90 – 93). Unites dogma (Christology), moral life and spirituality.

Deepened by Benedict XVI as master-theologian, integrating justice and love in *Caritas in Veritate*.

At the heart of this synthesis is the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, revealed by the Holy Spirit. Heralded in first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, which begins: "THE REDEEMER OF MAN, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history." Later he cites *Gaudium et Spes*: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (Rom 5:14), Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling". (RH, 8).

Francis now shows us how to live out this synthesis. "This guy," says Stephen Schneck of Catholic University [Wash, DC], "seems to be trying to be like Jesus, the image of Jesus in the Gospels." He is the Lord's gift after the rich teaching of his immediate predecessors.

This is a retreat not a course in theology. What does this mean for us personally as priests? Retreat is about renewal: our personal renewal in the context of church renewal. Vatican Two, Council of renewal – clearly only partially appropriated. Year of Faith: authentic renewal is always renewal of faith. Also element of discerning hour in which we live. . "This guy," says Stephen Schneck of Catholic University, "seems to be trying to be like Jesus, the image of Jesus in the Gospels." Receiving the synthesis of JP2 and B16 made possible by Vatican Two, and following Pope Francis in living the whole from its centre Jesus outwards. I hope I can encourage you to live the huge richness of our Catholic heritage as renewed and brought together, while reminding you that this is only possible through the Holy Spirit.

