

There is much more 'thirst for God' than you might think

Today there is so much need for listening, for free and open dialogue, for personal encounters that do not judge and do not condemn, and so much need for silence and presence in God.

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, not so long ago I attended the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. It was he himself who wrote the magnificent Encyclical "Deus Caritas est" a year after the beginning of his service as Pontiff, and in it the following statement that seems to me to be the 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" ([*Deus Caritas est*, 1](#)). Certainly that Person is Jesus Christ. And beginning from this Benedict XVI leaves us with statements like these:

- "Jesus Christ is the Truth made Person, who draws the world to himself.

- The light radiated by Jesus is the light of truth. Every other truth is a fragment of the Truth that is him and to which he refers.

- Jesus is the North Star of human freedom: without him, it loses its orientation, because without knowledge of the truth, freedom is denatured, isolated and reduced to sterile arbitrariness.

- With him one rediscovers freedom, recognises it as created for good and expresses it through charitable actions and behaviour.

- This is why Jesus gives man full familiarity with the truth and continually invites him to live in it.

- And nothing more than the love of truth can

propel human intelligence towards unexplored horizons.

– Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of truth, draws the heart of every man to himself, expands it and fills it with joy.”

There is a whole Christian teaching in these few compact sentences that is far from being merely “moral” or a set of cold and rigid rules devoid of life. The Christian life is first and foremost a *true encounter with God*.

And that is what I stated in the title of this message. In my opinion and deep conviction, there is much more “thirst for God” than we imagine, than there seems to be. It is not that I want to change the statistics of sociological studies or draw up some fictitious reality. I certainly do not intend to do so, but I do wish to make it understood that in the “*visa vis*” in the “face to face” encounter with the real life of so many people, of so many fathers and mothers, of so many families, of so many teenagers and young adults, what one finds, very often, is a life that is not easy, a life that must be “healed” daily, human relationships in which love is desired and necessary and which must be taken care of in every small gesture, in every small detail, in every action. And in this “face to face” there is so much need for listening, for free and open dialogue, for personal encounters that do not judge and do not condemn, *and so much need for silence and presence in God*.

I say this with great conviction. Right here in Valdocco, Turin, where I am, it surprises me and fills me with joy when a group of young people take the initiative to invite other young people for an hour of presence, silence and prayer before Jesus in the *Eucharist*, that is, an hour of *Eucharistic adoration*, and a hundred or so people – so many young people – respond to the appointment. Or in Rome, at Sacred Heart, we used to meet on Thursday evenings, and young people and young couples, some with their children, and even engaged couples were present at this moment because they felt that their lives needed this encounter with a Person who gives meaning to our

lives.



And I have experienced it as an example in many countries and places. That is why I am invite you here to do as Don Bosco would do. He did not hesitate for a moment to offer his boys the experience of an encounter with Jesus. And that God who is presence, who is God-with-us, as we celebrated at Christmas, is still the same God who calls, who invites, who reassures in every personal encounter, in every moment of rest in Him.



I remember one of Don Bosco's many "surprises" as he recounts in his Memoirs: "I was entering the church from the sacristy and I saw a young man raised to the height of the Tabernacle behind the choir, in the act of adoring the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling in the air, his head inclined and leaning against the door of the Tabernacle, in a sweet ecstasy of love like a Seraphim from Heaven. I called him by his name and he was soon roused and came down to the floor all upset, begging me not to reveal it to anyone. I repeat that I could recount many other similar facts to make it known that all the good that Don Bosco does he owes especially to his children."

Is it possible that Jesus is still the same God who wants to meet all of us today and many others, or are we ashamed and afraid to go down this road? Is it possible that many of us do not dare to invite others to experience what we are experiencing and that has been freely given and offered to us? Is it possible that because we are told that this is unfashionable and out of date, we believe too many negative messages and lose the strength to witness that many of us continue to enjoy every *personal encounter with the One who is the Lord of life?*

Pope Benedict was convinced that his life and his faith were "right" and **this is great, an encounter with his Lord**, and

this is how Pope Francis bid him farewell in the last words of his homily: 'Benedict, faithful friend of the Bridegroom, may your joy be perfect in hearing his voice finally and forever'. Let us therefore continue to promote, my friends, those encounters of Life that give us *profound life*, because there is more "thirst for God" than there is said to be or that we believe there is.