

Homily Preached
by Bishop David Evans, Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham
at the Requiem Mass offered for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI
at St Chad's Cathedral
Wednesday 11th January 2023

Readings

Job 19:1.23-27;

Psalm 26

Luke 12:35-40

Job was a complex character as it to be expected of a human being.

He was a man blessed by God, who, with God's consent, lost everything he loved and which gave his life meaning.

He became in outward appearance someone whom God had rejected.

His wife suggested that as he had lost so much, he might as well give up his life as well; 'curse God and die'.

His friends were less blunt, but the only consolation that they could offer was that Job himself was responsible for his condition and that though he was too stubborn to admit it, he must have offended God in some way, aroused God's anger and deserved retribution.

Job has a reputation for patience though he really deserves a reputation for his determination to confront God with his apparent injustice without at the same time losing faith in him.

Another thing about Job was that he lived outside the boundaries of Israel in a society that worshipped many Gods while himself believing in the one God who had revealed himself to the Israelites.

Job then is a sort of template of humanity as well as a type of Jesus Christ. Both were fully human, both innocent of sin and both entirely committed to service of the mystery of God at whatever cost to themselves.

Job did as well as man born before Jesus could do to make his faith plain. He had encountered an eternal and transcendent being who had blessed him and yet had not abandoned him even when everything seemed lost. That was why the truth needed the hardest engraving tool and why the everlasting mountains were the only suitable place for his declaration of faith.

Job had refused to die because he knew that his life was a gift from God that was to be spent trying to immerse himself in the depths of God so that he would be ready to look on the face of God when death came and discovered that God had never turned his face from him.

Though Job was not the author of today's Responsorial Psalm what it expresses would be a summary of Job's longings: *to live in the House of the Lord to behold his temple, to see God's face.*

It would not be wise to draw a detailed parallel between Job and Pope Benedict XVI but they do have their faith in common and the longing that urged them both to seek the face of God, not only for their own personal completeness as human beings but for everyone else who set out on the same quest.

After the Second World War Pope Benedict discovered himself in a culture very different from the one to which his religious upbringing and faith had naturally inclined him. He addressed a world that had kept the outward rituals and expressions of faith but had lost its substance and its soul.

From the beginning Pope Benedict laboured to grasp for himself the fullness of the gospel as a personal encounter with Jesus who alone knows the truth about humanity and about God.

The responsibility of the Church and all its members is to preserve the Gospel as the expression of the living, loving and demanding God and to preach that in the idiom that our own culture may assimilate and live by. As Pope Benedict's last words show, "I love you, Jesus", that idiom is love properly understood and modelled on the love of Jesus.

Jesus had his own words of encouragement for those who wished to behold the temple of God and see his face. We heard them in this evening's Gospel.

Desire for the truth keeps Christians constantly on their toes.

What was missing for Job but is offered to the disciples of Jesus is the joyful anticipation of being treated as an honoured guest at the Lord's table: *he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them.*

It is right to celebrate Pope Benedict's achievements and to acknowledge his frailties in the spirit of our own flawed humanity but that would mean less to Pope Benedict than the judgement of God. So we pray that his lifelong prayer may be answered, that he will gaze on the face of God and find him not aloof and that he may enjoy the reward of the servant who was found awake when his Lord came to lead him to his Wedding Feast.