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## Homily on the Day of Benedict XVI's Funeral, Cathedral of Christ the King, Katowice, 5 January 2023

Homilia w dniu pogrzebu Benedykta XVI – Katowice,  
katedra, 5 stycznia 2023 r.

1 John 3:11–21

John 1:43–51

**B**eloved in Christ the Lord, our Priests, Sisters, Brothers!  
“Children, let us love [...] in truth,” we heard St John’s words just now. It is through love – says the saint – “in deed and truth,” that “we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him.” To love in truth – that’s our task.

*Cooperatores Veritatis*, “Cooperators of the truth” – this was Benedict XVI’s episcopal and papal motto. He took it from the Third Letter of St John. There, in verse 8, the apostle speaks of working together for the truth, becoming “co-workers in the truth,” which was rendered in the Vulgate translation as *cooperatores veritatis*.

The reality of truth was something absolutely fundamental for the late Pope: to put it in John’s terms: he loved us with the truth. That is why I propose that we dedicate these moments, this reflection on the Word of God, to Benedict XVI’s understanding of truth; or rather, to a few theses of his that deal with the contemporary question of truth. I trust this form of our prayer today would have suited the pontiff best.

Christian hope – Benedict XVI said – flows from the fact that faith speaks the truth. This is the essence of the matter. What exactly, he asked, is the ‘Christian longing for truth’? Is it a kind of usurpation stemming from a feeling

of superiority? From a lack of respect and humility towards others? Arrogance stemming from ignorance (dilettantism, a lack of elementary knowledge of the irremediable complications and difficulties of arriving at the truth, granting that truth exists; difficulties that make “arriving at the truth” virtually impossible, and certainly unprovable)? Is it an obscurantists’ assault on tolerance and pluralism? Is truth accessible to man? Is it worth pursuing? Does it promise salvation? Perhaps the contrary is to be believed that t abandonment of the quest for truth is the genuine liberation of man who, freed from this burden, can shake off the never-never world and take matters into his own hands instead?

What is at the core of things? How does reality operate? What is the truth?

The dominant, most vociferous mainstream of modern philosophy holds sceptic (and this is putting it mildly) views on the existence and what follows the human cognition of truth. This scepticism has been expounded since the times of nominalism, through Cartesianism, Kantianism, Enlightenment, 19th and 20th century philosophies up to postmodernism. Also today, science and ethics (public morality) along with the dominant philosophical and political cultures of the West still cling to the conception of truth (and hence of freedom) formulated in the 18th century Enlightenment. And the question of truth, which was once the foundation of universities, is marginalised or even regarded as “unscientific.” The claim to know and express truth that is binding on all in its greatness is denounced as an anachronism – a “bizarre medieval arrogance” – and as such equated with a tendency conducive to all types of fundamentalism.

The vehemence and fervour with which this position is proclaimed and defended along with the accompanying fierce combat against the dissenting opinion (observable especially in the academic and media circles), this missionary, even neophyte zeal with which this position is promoted and considered unchallengeable – make one wonder. Benedict XVI argues that all this is fuelled by the “deeper spiritual levels” which arouse “the suspicion that truth exists” and that it is discoverable/knowable, and as such makes a demand, a dangerous attack on my way of life. “It is against this [intuition of truth] that one must defend oneself with a passion that arises where one is affected in the deepest part of one’s existence.”<sup>1</sup> Spot on. Simply put: the fight against truth translates into fear of conversion.

As it is, we need the presence of Truth at the centre of the world we are building. A world without truth turns into the unpredictable power of relativism

<sup>1</sup> J. Ratzinger, *Prawda w teologii* [Truth in Theology], transl. M. Mijalska, Kraków 2001, p. 89.

(which, based on falsehood, sooner or later will occupy the empty space left by truth) coupled with cruel self-interested panegotism (the more camouflaged the more dangerous), where the boundaries between good and evil are set by the stronger or by the opinion of a random (parliamentary) majority. Even Christian love/charity without truth becomes merely a storehouse of good intentions and feelings, useful but marginal, not exceeding the merely sentimental and emotional.

This is why we need a return to what the Pope provocatively called “Christian naivety,” for which the question of truth is still valid, for which knowledge is grounded in truth. We need the old Christian conviction that truth can be known rather than produced, appropriated, seized, used against others, manipulated; it can be known with all humility and a sense of the frailty of that knowledge, as of everything that is human. Truth can be known with the aid of the faith in the Creator and with pride in humanity. There is truth, and this truth is knowable.

The greatest fallacy of relativism is that it *a priori* regards man's blindness to the truth as an insurmountable thing. The Pope wrote thus:

Today it has become an irresistibly forceful prejudice to dismiss as simplistic and at the same time arrogant those who are reputed to believe that they “have” the truth. Such people are supposedly incapable of dialogue and ultimately cannot be taken seriously. For nobody “has” the truth. All of us, the argument goes, can only be searching for it. But – we must reply with another question – what kind of search is this that can never reach a conclusion? [...] It seems to me that we should turn the question about presumption the other way round: Is it not presumption to say that God cannot give us the truth as a gift? That he cannot open our eyes? Does it not show contempt for God to say that, once we have been born blind, truth is not our concern? Is it not a degradation of man and his longing for God to claim that we human beings are merely groping in the dark forever? Hand in hand with this, furthermore, goes the real presumption, namely, that we and we alone would like to take God's place and determine who we are and what we do and what we want to make out of ourselves and of the world. Besides, knowing and searching are not mutually exclusive.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, transl. M.J. Miller, San Francisco 2004, Kindle 735–750.

What does it mean then? What then is truth? Who is truth? Let us repeat the most famous question anyone has ever asked: “What is truth?” (John 18:38). The answer: “I am the truth” (John 14:6).

This answer does not exhaust what Christianity has to say about truth; it is also the cornerstone of Christian faith: it is not a beautiful but vague abstract hidden behind the veil of myth, nor a storehouse of positive sentiments, a self-doubtful correction of an imperfect world, a positive idea like any other. No, the Christian faith has a real basis, its hopeful strength comes from the truth. For it is He, the incarnate Divine Logos (each of these three words is relevant here) – the basis of the logic of Christian faith – who is the truth. This is the foundation of everything Christian, and of everything in general. It is one and the same foundation. The Pope wrote: the Christian faith “was not part of a particular cultural tradition, differing from one people to another, but belonged instead to the realm of truth, which concerns everyone equally,”<sup>3</sup> not only to Christians. The Christian faith has access to the deepest, ultimate reality – the truth about how things are. It answers the question of how things really are with me, with us, with the world. For it is not silence – as the Gnostics of all eras want – but the Word (Logos) that is the “ultimate thing” given to us by God.

“For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth” (John 18:37). To the point that this truth, too, will be the cause of His death: “you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God” (John 8:40). Jesus dies because an attack on the truth has been launched; His obedience is to stand by the truth against the conspiracy of lies. For no lie can ever withstand the truth: it must either repent or gag the prophet’s lips.

And that was exactly the problem of the Great Pope. He was supposed to say what they wanted him to say, what confirmed their views and their way of life; he was supposed to keep silent about what was inconvenient, choosing only some of the puzzle pieces from the Gospel distorted for the needs of (post) modernity... For a fair price, in their opinion: a better PR, postponement of media criticism, turning a blind eye to blunders. Benedict XVI had the courage (and the audacity) to throw in the faces of the powers of modernity a thesis that absolutely must not be proclaimed under the supreme penalty of exclusion, civil death and imprisonment in the dungeon for lunatics. His thesis was: neither modernisation, nor globalisation nor innovation are God; God alone is God. Modernisation is good if it serves a divine cause. Only then will it bring good to man. This is the truth.

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 2010, no. 92.

Only this truth liberates... Only the freedom given by truth is true freedom. This is a very important lesson for our world, which longs for freedom, but treats truth as the opposite of freedom. Meanwhile, truth and freedom cannot and must not be divorced from each other because if they are, both are both lost.

Well, Jesus-Truth heard "Take him away, take him away!" (John 19:15). But "Take him away" shouted at the truth ends up badly for those shouting. It is irreplaceable by anything. The Pope quotes Richard von Weizsäcker, President of Germany: "I believe society can only really develop if it is rooted in truth rather than in happiness."

Freedom without truth always turns out, sooner or later, to be the pseudo-freedom of slaves. And it ends up at troughs, feeding on fodder intended for swine, envying them because swine are not subject to the curse of freedom. In the most progressivist places of modernity, troughs with fodder already supersede truth and freedom.

Benedict asks why does becoming true mean becoming good? Why is truth good – a good in itself? Why is it valid in its own right, without the need of a purpose? Why does the very question of truth, devoid of scepticism, arouse such resistance, such fury, and, on the other hand, such devotion on the part of its defenders? Why have the most godless and inhuman empires in the history of the world invariably been based on a gigantic lie? What is there in truth that so attracts the human mind and heart? Who is there (in it)? And he answers that having delved into the essence of truth, we arrive at the concept of God. He is in it.

Finally, let us return to today's Gospel. Philip: "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets" (John 1:45). Nathanael: "*Rabbi*, you are the Son of God" (John 1:49).

This is the truth. This is the truth of our lives: we have found in our lives the Son of God, God Himself! Like Philip and Nathanael. What a Grace has been granted to us.... It has reached us through the corridors of history and genesis, through the streams of blood of the martyrs, through the prayers of our ancestors, through the holiness not ours, but ultimately through the decision of our weak hearts that have been made powerful by Grace.... Why, we could worship the moon, rip open the bellies of sacrificial beasts, or worship the spiritual emptiness in a western city before becoming sacrificed to the deity of euthanasia. On the contrary, we were granted the Grace to find the Son of God... But this Grace was not given to satisfy our pride, but to convert ourselves and others. To be co-workers in the truth.

Amen.

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