

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

There is a story in Buddhist literature about a man who came up to a monk and said, “*When I look at you, I see a pig!*” And the monk said, “*And when I look at you, I see the Buddha.*” The man said, “*How is that?*” The monk replied, “*Well, what you see is what you are on the inside. If you see the Buddha, then you are the Buddha. If you see a pig....*”

The Talmud tells us that “***We do not see things as they are. We see things as we are.***” The spiritual life begins with knowing who we are. Our deeds then flow from this identity.

I saw something where **Comedian Bill Maher** compared the Fundamentalist sect of Jesus of the Latter Day Saints (the one in Texas) with that of Roman Catholic Church, which he called the child abusing cult. He went on to say, “*Its leader also has a compound and he used to be a Nazi and wears funny hats.*” Of course it was a reference to our pope, Benedict, who, as a teen, was forced to join the Hitler Youth (as were all teens in Germany). Because of public backlash, Maher backtracked, but then turned it into another insult: “*Okay, he was a kid and of course he had to do it. He was never a Nazi. Technically you are right, but it distracts from the main point. If he had been a CEO, he would be in jail.*”

An opinion writer for the **Richmond Times Dispatch** quoted Pope Benedict, “*No word of mine could describe the pain and harm inflicted by such abuse...children deserve to grow up in a healthy understanding of sexuality...they should be spared the degrading manifestation and crude manipulation of sexuality so prevalent today. What does it mean to speak of child protection when pornography and violence can be viewed in so many homes?*” **The writer went on to imply that Benedict was blaming the media for the scandal and thus dismissed his words as a “cop-out.”**

While others see our pope as a man who is humbling himself and reaching out in love for healing, they see pigs. They react to his presence with cynicism and jaded remarks. “***You do not see things as they are; you see things as you are.***” Yes, jaded, cynical and empty of hope. Remember this if someone ever demeans you with words that diminish your self worth.

This past week we remembered with great sadness the tragedy that occurred at **Virginia Tech on April 16th**, in which an individual took the lives of 27 students and five professors. Of course all were innocent, never having done anything to this man. He killed because he could only see darkness, because he was darkness. He could no longer see good because he hated himself and thus he hated everyone. “***You do not see things as they are; you see things as you are.***”

In leaving the Popes Mass at National’s Stadium, the crowd ended up being crammed together in a narrow passageway leading to the metro. There were a **number of protestors** with signs such as, “*Priests are predators*” and others with warnings of hell for attending Mass with the Pope. Over microphones they shouted out warnings, condemning us as apostates. Shouting, trying to tell us who we are, but **in reality they were telling us who they were.** (Of course we consisted, of nuns, priests, women, men and children; a scary lot, to be sure.)

In the midst of these protestors, the crowd erupted as one, shouting back, “*Long live the Pope! Viva Pope!*” Ours were words of life and hope. I also saw two children holding up a banner with a picture of Benedict and his words “*Christ Our Hope.*” Yes, one sees hope because they are Easter people, people of great hope in the love of Christ. The other has no hope and sees only judgment and destruction.

Through the words of his successor, Peter, Christ sees us as “*chosen, royal, holy & God’s own people.*” Jesus places all of his hope in you with those words. Jesus wants us to remember this; to remember that this is who he called you to be.

I say this because it is easy to forget who we are as there are so many other voices with negative messages trying to tell us who they think we are.

*Some years ago a **violent video game called Postal** was sold in stores. It revolved around the killing of innocent adults and children. The creators of this game worked it out that the only way a player could exit the game was to put a simulated gun in his or her mouth and pull the trigger. The game’s creators saw the players not as *chosen, holy, royal, or one of God’s own*, but as *disposable*.

*What does it say that we will **no longer teach abstinence**, but instead hands out condoms and teaches only birth control? It says we no longer believe in our young people; it says we do not believe you can ever be that person who God called you to be.

*What does it say when we are told to drive this and wear this, because this is who you should be?

Yes, it is very easy to become lost and forget who we are. **Have you ever really looked within yourselves and asked, “Who am I?”** How might we discover this?

Imagine you are traveling along and become lost. You then ask a man for directions and he replies, “*Okay, go up ahead and turn right at the bank, then take another right, then left, then another left. After that, go past the lake and take a right, but then you will need to make a U-turn and go back a few blocks, where you will make a right and....*”

But then a woman next to him interrupts, saying, “Follow me, I’ll lead you there.” That person to us is *The Way* and this is what Jesus does for us.

Jesus **does not** leave us with complicated directions; no he give us the **successor to Peter and the Vicar of Christ in the Pope!** To whom Jesus said, “*You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven...*” (Matt. 16:18-20) Yes, follow him and he will lead you to Christ and discover who you are.

I left the rectory Thursday morning at 2:30 a.m. with a friend of mine *to follow him*. We joined the bus and arrived in D.C. a bit before 6:00 a.m. We were told to vest and head out to the field, which was shrouded in darkness and 30 degree temperature. Along with 50,000 others we waited for four hours, freezing and exhausted. And then came the sun, replacing the cold with its burning heat. Perhaps I could **quote Peter by saying he** *“called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”*

This is so very true, because Pope Benedict calls us out of the darkness and how we may discover who we really are: *“May all Catholics experience the consolation of hope. His authority is to forgive sin entrusted to priests mean the Church is constantly reborn – healed of division and inspiring new life, freedom and hope. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of new life.”*

Yes, Christ Our Hope. Only in and before Christ we find ourselves.

***When we dare to confront all of our sins with him.**

***When we dare to take down all of our walls/masks we have erected and painful memories that have drained us of life.**

***When we dare to leave the darkness for his wonderful light** can we discover who we really are or should be: *Chosen race, royal, holy, God’s own people...children of the light.*