

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

God Is Love

I recall the day that Pope Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, was published, I left my building for lunch and found myself in the elevator with two young women. Believe it or not, they were not discussing the document. Let's listen in.

"Have you *seen* their salads?" woman #1 asked. "They use the same lettuce for the *salad* that they use for the *sandwich* and that's, like, *so* not what a salad is supposed to be."

"I *know*!" replied woman #2. "The salads are so *lame*. It's like vegetables and chopped lettuce. Shouldn't, you know, a salad be *big* leaves?"

"Exactly!" woman #1 said. "A salad is everything—but without the bread, you know?"

"Yeah!"

The doors opened and we walked into the lobby and headed for the street.

"And sometimes the salads are so *small*," woman #2 complained. "Why do I even bother? I *try* to eat salads a lot, so I'm, like, saying that I'm *healthy*, but the stuff they gave you is just *so* not worth it."

"Uh-huh."

We parted ways then. My head hurt. I had no idea who the women were, or where they were eating, or who was responsible for this crime against lettuce. But as I walked up the street, my thoughts turned back to the pope's encyclical.

I had read some excerpts that morning about this passionate plea for love—true Christian charity, the kind that takes our faith back to its very roots. The encyclical is about pouring out one's life for another—giving body and spirit and soul to another child of God, for that very act leads us closer to Him, who is love. God is love. Yes. *Deus Caritas Est*.

Benedict was writing about how we are to enact that love and bring it to the wider world. He was taking the grand view of history—and the grand view of the Church, I think. Instead of engaging in quibbles and quarrels about liturgy or theology—what many expected from the man some called the Enforcer—he stood on a hill and surveyed the landscape. What is missing? Love. (Cue Burt Bacharach: *What the world needs now is love, sweet love...*)

The Gospel is so clear. Love one another. It seems so simple—and yet it is so hard. I picked up my sandwich at the corner deli and headed back to my building. I didn't see the women from the elevator again. But I realized that if I was to take Benedict's teaching to heart, I needed to love everyone—even strangers I bump into on the elevator.

God help me. Let us ask for divine guidance. Let us strive to give of ourselves. Let us seek to be understood—and to understand. Let us love. And, of course, let us love lettuce. Amen.

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