



EXPLORING DEUS CARITAS EST

A Four-part Process for Small Groups on Pope Benedict XVI's First Encyclical

From the Author

February 14, 2006

Dear Friends,

Pope Benedict XVI begins his first encyclical to bishops, priests and deacons, men and women religious and all lay people by quoting 1 John 4:16, "God is love and he who abides in love abides in God." He seeks to proclaim, simply, yet boldly, the principal message of the Christian faith, that God is love and that love has become incarnated (made flesh) in the person of Jesus Christ. The pope writes that Jesus gives expression to the Jewish scriptures by combining the love of God with the love of neighbor, making the great commandment, "Love one another," the fundamental precept of the New Covenant.

Obviously, this message is not new. But in a world beset by violence, threats of intimidation, and exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, this encyclical comes to us as truly good news. The pope states that the gospel message of love is an important antidote to the poison of hatred, violence, and vengeance that seems to be sweeping our world.

For some, a surprising element of the encyclical is that instead of condemning sex and eroticism, the pope calls for a re-claiming of erotic love as a central part of being human. A renewed embrace of this love needs to be done in a holistic and integrated fashion, and it is best done within the context of agape love. This is the love that Jesus preached and that finds its focus in the New Testament.

The four sessions of Exploring Deus Caritas Est each provide a short commentary on various themes of the encyclical, reflection/discussion questions, and additional suggestions for follow-up. These are meant to help you integrate the pope's teaching in this, his first encyclical, with your own experience. These sessions presume that you have access to the text of the encyclical. They can be used by individuals or with small groups.

I pray that you find this resource fruitful and come to your own positive assessment and integration of the timeliness and hope of Pope Benedict's message.

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