The Chair of St. Peter: "...a privileged sign of the love of God."

Pope Benedict XVI

A Good Afternoon to you and to each of my esteemed listeners! Welcome to EWTN's Open Line Tuesday edition! Barbara McGuigan here, alive and grateful, as always, to be your host each Tuesday and Saturday's on The Good Fight! It is a grace to have the opportunity to discuss very important issues that affect our lives, our dignity, our Faith, our Church and our sanity! Today is the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter. How blessed we are as Catholics to commemorate the teaching authority of the Vicar of Christ. As Tertullian is quoted in today's Magnificat, "How blessed is the Church of Rome, on which the apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood!" God's airwaves are open, here are the numbers to call:

In North America call 1-800-585-9396
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Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI said, "The Chair represents [the pope's] mission as guide of the entire People of God. Celebrating the 'Chair' of Peter means attributing a strong spiritual significance to it and recognizing it as a privileged sign of the love of God."

My brothers and sisters, the Meditation of the Day in our Magnificat concerns Understanding the Chair of St. Peter by a British convert to Catholicism, Monsignor Robert Benson. Personally, I think it is brilliant! Hopefully, you will too!

Monsignor Benson begins...

> Treat the Catholic Church as divine only and you will stumble over her scandals, her failures, and her shortcomings. Treat her as human only and you will be silenced by her miracles, her sanctity, and her eternal resurrections. Of course, the Catholic Church is human. She consists of fallible men, and her humanity is not even safeguarded as was that of Christ against the incursions of sin. Always, therefore, there have been scandals, and always will be. Popes may betray their trust, in all human matters; priests their flocks; laymen their faith. No man is secure. And again, since she is human it is perfectly true that she has profited by human circumstances for the increase of her power... There is scarcely an opening in human affairs into which she has not plunged; hardly an opportunity she has missed. Human affairs, human sins, and weaknesses as well as human virtues, have all contributed to her power. So grows a tree, even in uncongenial soil. The rocks that impede the roots later become their support; the rich soil, waiting for an occupant, has been drawn up into the life of the leaves; the very winds that imperiled the young sapling have developed too its power of resistance. Yet these things do not make the tree.
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> For her humanity, though it is the body in which her divinity dwells, does not create that divinity. Certainly human circumstances have developed her, yet what but divine Providence ordered and developed those human circumstances?...

My brothers and sisters, as I read this, I began to think of how many of us, especially in apostolates, but really all of us in various callings, have had to deal with "the rocks that impede

the roots"...only to find out that the rocks in our path, "later become their support"? Now, don't get me wrong! I'm not saying it is easy to endure a Cross that comes when you've done your level best with great love and zeal, only to have the rug pulled out from under you, and your apostolate by those human beings who have the power to do it, be they members of the clergy or laity alike! But you see, when a person is moved only by greater love and zeal for souls, and not for their own self-interest, all the trials and humiliations they must endure will be seen by them as their particular Cross. These individuals will recognize this Cross as permitted by the hand of God; they will graciously embrace it, offer it up and make it work for the greater honor and glory of a great God!

A great monk once said,

> "When a soul truly loves, that soul neither measures what it does nor weighs what it suffers; never does it seek for a reward, but only seeks that which it believes to be for God's greater glory. Such a soul never says 'enough' when labor or fatigue are in question. Because of the purity of its aim, whatever the result, that soul neither excuses itself or protests its good intentions, its motive being love, its efforts and sufferings always giving glory to God. The soul is not troubled nor does it lose its peace of mind if it meets with contradiction or persecution or humiliation. It's sole motive is love and it leaves results in Love's hands. These souls are not mercenary; they seek only the honor and glory of God."

Last December 26th, Our Sunday Visitor ran an article by Thomas J. Craughwell called, *How Mistreated Saints Stayed True to the Church.* He opened his article by saying:

> Jesus Christ founded the Church, but it has always been administered by human beings. To say that humans are flawed is to state the obvious, and popes, bishops, deacons, nuns, as well as the Catholic laity, are no exception. The Church shows us the way to Heaven. Through the Mass and the sacraments it brings God's grace into the world, and following Christ's example, the Church sets the standard for personal holiness and selfless charity to our neighbor.
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> Nonetheless, since the night St. Peter denied Christ three times, the Church has been plagued by representatives - male and female- who have given scandal, have been unfaithful, were arrogant or just had lousy people skills...

Brothers and sisters, some Catholics who've encountered such things leave the Church...and some who've suffered at the hands of the representatives of the church... remain faithful and become canonized saints! Mr. Craughwell proceeded to tell how St. Elizabeth of Hungary suffered serious abuse from her zealous spiritual director. When she died at the young age of 24, "He took the lead in gathering material for Elizabeth's canonization!"

He also writes about the suffering of St. John of the Cross:

> In 1577, a band of renegade Carmelites, who refused to submit to necessary reform kidnapped, Teresa of Avila's chaplain, confessor and protege, St. John of the Cross, imprisoned him, locked him inside a tiny cell where a 3-inch wide slit in the outer wall passed for a window. His friar-jailers gave him so little food he almost starved to

death; because he was refused water for washing or a fresh habit, he became infested with lice; he was refused candles or lamps, or a fire to warm him in winter, plus was flogged so brutally that he bore the scars for the rest of his life.

Terrified that he would be locked up forever, John took refuge in meditation, composing mentally some of his finest mystical poems. The long interior conversations with God kept his faith alive. Being a great contemplative, John was also a practical man who plotted his escape...as he crept out of his cell late one night, weak and disoriented, he called on the Blessed Virgin for help and he found himself at the door of one of Teresa's convents. The nuns kept John hidden and nursed him back to health.

And finally, St. Joan of Arc, said Mr. Craughwell, is "Certainly the most extreme example of a saint who suffered at the hands of churchmen by falling into the hands of a corrupt Church tribunal of French clerics who pushed aside all notions of justice in order to prove their loyalty to their English overlords.

Brothers and sisters, twenty-five years after Joan was mercilessly burned at the stake, "her mother and brothers petitioned Rome to revisit the case. In 1456, Joan's case was heard again, this time in Paris' Cathedral at Notre Dame. And enormous crowd of Joan's supporters filled the church as witness after witness testified that Joan was orthodox and as true a daughter of the Faith as the Church had ever known. Her vindication was pronounced at Rouen, where she had been wrongly executed."

Mr. Croughwell ends his paper by saying:

"The Catechism of the Catholic Church states candidly that the Church is 'at once holy and always in need of purification.' Sts. Elizabeth, John and Joan knew from personal experience just how bad churchmen could be. Yet when their persecutors betrayed everything Christ and His Church stands for, Elizabeth, John and Joan did not give up, but clung more firmly to their Faith and the Church Jesus Christ founded."

Brothers and sisters, to me the operative words are these: "when their persecutors betrayed everything Christ and His Church stands for." Jesus weeps for His beloved souls that are persecuted and betrayed from within and from without, and yet, in His wisdom, He permits these same beloved souls to experience such suffering to more perfectly experience the glory of His passion. As the great monk said, "May the blessing of God be upon each of us who simply tries to do what is right."

I look forward to speaking with you today! Here are the numbers to call: 1-800-585-9396 and 1-205-271-2985.

Closing: A thousand thanks for your great calls and emails! A thousand thanks are in order for my brilliant producers Tom Graye, Elena Rodriguez and Mike Romano.

On the Feast of the apostle Peter, pillar of the Church, our Magnificat prays to the Lord Jesus Christ: Be with your people, Lord.

Beside the sea, you called Simon Peter, the fisherman, to become a fisher of men:
send new messengers so that many may hear your word.

On the lake, you commanded the wind to be still so that the disciples' boat would not founder:
keep your Church amid all storms and strengthen those who guide it, especially our Holy Father.

After your resurrection, you gathered the disciples around Peter:
gather your people into one flock around one shepherd.

For yours are the kingdom, the power and the glory, now and forever! Amen.

Until next week on Open Line, Blessed be God and may He mightily bless you! Bye for now!