

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Learned Ignorance**      Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time      Tuesday, July 15, 2014  
8:15 AM    Is 7:1-9;    Mt 11:20-24    **St. Bonaventure**, bishop, doctor    (You have to feel and experience your dependence upon God.)

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Bonaventure, who is called a doctor by the Church, although I don't know that he would have appreciated the title. **He was very learned, but he put very little value in learning.** Probably one of his favorite gospels was the prayer of Jesus: **"You have hidden from the learned and the clever what you have revealed to the childlike."**

He would focus a great deal on Christ as the one who died on the Cross to bring forgiveness to sinners, but actually the whole idea of redemption is fuller than that. Redemption is not just about forgiving sin or bringing compassion into the world, although Jesus did that. But **redemption is a fuller picture of restoring our birthright.** When a slave is given back freedom, that's called redemption. But in the biblical idea we were never born as slaves—maybe according to human law but not according to fact. **We are really born as children of God. Only we lose track of that.** We lose contact with that essential unity that actually a child does have in the womb. In the womb a child is united to mother and therefore to God and to the whole of creation, but not in a differentiated way that can be expressed because a child can't think in a differentiated way. An infant cannot think in a differentiated way, so therefore we have a situation whereby, as we grow up in the world, **we gradually lose touch with all the life and love that we had in the womb.** We start to identify ourselves as this little being all by ourselves making our way in the world, often full of **anxiety and fear** and all kinds of qualities not really appropriate to children of God. But they come in **because we lose contact with God** and with all the wonderful qualities that human nature is endowed with because it is **made in the image and the likeness of God.**

Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born again. And **the womb of new birth is Baptism.** And the mother of new birth is the Church, the community of the **Church. We are supposed to help people be aware of who they really are, but often we have forgotten also. We depend too much on so-called learning: catechism, teachings, doctrine.** This is where **Bonaventure** comes in and says, well, don't seek that. **Don't seek more learning, doctrine. Seek the bridegroom.** Bonaventure believed that the way to inner peace and to

happiness and union with God is through an identification with **Jesus the bridegroom, to see ourselves as wedded and espoused by God**, to seek God through the feeling nature, which is closer to the childlikeness, since children can't think in the truest sense. So we use now, according to St. Bonaventure, the more simple **childlike faculties: imagination, feeling, love, desire**. All those things children can do, and we start **focusing on the one thing that's important: God**.

Now all along we couldn't even exist if it weren't for God. Not only are we created, but we are sustained. And if God did not sustain us, we would cease to exist. But we lose touch with that truth. We don't feel that truth. Even if we learn it verbally, it doesn't really make much impression. Bonaventure's idea is this has to become the central impression you have. **You have to feel and experience your dependence upon God**. You have to be so conscious that you cannot exist without God. You have to desire nothing more than **being with God**, and allow that to be what it can be, what it should be, what it is supposed to be: **satisfaction of all desire because that's what desire is for**. We are not created just for whatever. We are not supposed to just make up whatever. We are supposed to find what God created us for, and **God created us for God**. And toward this end **very often even learning, doctrine, doesn't help**. That was the point Bonaventure made very clearly. So he is a doctor, yes, but perhaps we should call him a doctor of "learned ignorance!"