

## Study Guide *Deus Caritas Est*

### **What is the Magisterium?**

The living, teaching office of the Church, whose task it is to give an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form (Sacred Scripture), or in the form of Tradition. The Magisterium ensures the Church's fidelity to the teaching of the Apostles in matters of faith and morals. (CCC Glossary)

### **Where do encyclicals get their titles?**

The title of an encyclical is always taken from the first few Latin words of the text. The text is translated into many different languages but the Latin text remains the official text.

### **Should lay persons read encyclicals?**

Although encyclicals are usually addressed to the bishops of the Church, there is no intention on the part of the Pope to restrict the readership. On the contrary, any Pope would be pleased if all members of the Church — and, indeed, all persons of good will — would be interested in reading his encyclicals. When a Pope writes an encyclical, he is hoping to bring some topic of importance to the attention of the entire Church, ultimately for the good of all. As the Vicar of Christ and the Successor of St. Peter, the Pope is the Chief Teacher of the universal Church. Catholics and those sympathetic to the Church would do well to meditate upon and to assimilate the wisdom of each encyclical.

### **Recommendations**

This encyclical is quite accessible in its style and presentation. Do not be afraid to tackle the entire document. In comparison to other encyclicals it is not very long and the concepts should be understandable to the average parishioner or student.

### **Summary**

The first encyclical of a pontificate is noteworthy because it sets the stage for the themes that will be front and central to that particular Pope. For many, the theme of Pope Benedict's first encyclical was a surprise. Many speculated that his initial encyclical would have the air of a strong authoritarian who was set upon disciplining many in the Church and reprimanding "the world". During his time as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger was often caricatured as a "rigid" and sometimes even "cruel" enforcer of Church Dogma. This adverse judgment on him had no basis in fact; nonetheless it was the portrait of him that many had chosen to accept. It *is* true that it was his job to protect Church doctrine, which sometimes required him to reprimand or to discipline wayward theologians, but the image of him perpetuated by the media was, and is, far from the truth.

Those who know him well describe him as a brilliant, but rather shy and retiring professor type, who always strives to speak from the heart of the Church. Those inside and outside of the Church respect Pope Benedict for his great

intellect and learning. By all accounts, he is unfailingly kind and has a great capacity for listening, even to those with whom he does not agree. In short, he is a faithful disciple of Jesus and the Church.

Evidence of his love for the Gospel emerges quite clearly in this, his first encyclical. Taking it in conjunction with his second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, one can see that Pope Benedict is laying the foundation for a renewed appreciation for the fundamental points of Christian Revelation. At the same time, he is encouraging serious thinkers, both Christian and non-Christian, to take a fresh look at the Gospel of Jesus Christ and, on the basis of that Gospel, to reevaluate popular culture from the very roots.

In reaffirming the specifically Christian revelation that "God is love", Pope Benedict compares the great gift of *eros*, romantic love, with the love that God reveals in Jesus Christ. He weighs and compares them, showing how the human desire for *eros* is confirmed, elevated, and transformed in the love of God.

In Part II, Pope Benedict meditates on how love is to be "organized" in society. The overarching question of this section is: "What, if anything, makes Christian charity distinct from other works performed by the state, and/or those motivated by modern ideologies?" The Pope concludes that ideological motivations for re-ordering society are different from the motivation provided by Jesus Christ; therefore there are temptations to avoid, for those who work for the Church and Christ, if their "charitable activity is to maintain all of its splendor and not become just another form of social assistance" (art. 31)

The social activity of the Church is laid bare in this second part, to get at the roots of God's new command "...that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn. 13:34-5)

### **Prayer to Love God above all things**

God, my Father, may I love you in all things and above all things.

May I reach the joy which you have prepared for me in Heaven.

Nothing is good that is against your will, and all that is good comes from your hand.

Place in my heart a desire to please you and fill my mind with thoughts of your love, so that I may grow in your wisdom and enjoy your peace.

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## Study Questions

### **Introduction**

1. What does the Pope mean when he claims that “[b]eing Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and decisive direction.”?
  - a. In what way does the Pope link the Christian faith to the faith of Israel?
  - b. What is the Pope’s intention in writing this Encyclical?

### **The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History**

#### **A problem of language**

2. What is the problem of language that Pope Benedict identifies?

#### **“Eros” and “Agape”-Difference and Unity**

3. What Enlightenment criticism of Christianity does the Pope mention?  
Note: The Old Testament Song of Songs is not a long book. As preparation for the reading of the Encyclical the leader may wish to assign it prior to discussion or else have it read it within the group at this juncture.
4. Does Christianity oppose *eros*?
5. What two things emerge about that nature of *eros* in this early part of the Encyclical?
6. What details does the Pope offer about the Biblical book “Song of Songs” to help clarify the nature of “eros”?
  - a. What does it mean to say that love looks toward the eternal?
  - b. Why does the Pope introduce the sacrifice of Jesus at this point?
7. Why can *eros* and *agape* not be separated?
  - a. How does the Pope link the story of Jacob’s letter to this reality?
8. Summarize the Pope’s first “resting place” in the Encyclical.

#### **The Newness of Biblical Faith**

9. What is new and unique about what is revealed to Israel?
10. Using the metaphor of adultery, explain how divine love is shown to be different from human love.
11. What mystery is revealed in the creation account of Genesis?
  - a. What relation of *eros* to marriage is revealed?
  - b. Is this unique? How?

### **Jesus Christ-The Incarnate Love of God**

12. What does Pope Benedict assert is unique about the New Testament?
13. How is the imagery of marriage “now realized in a way previously inconceivable”?
14. How is it that worship and ethics (*ethos*) are intimately united by Christ?
15. How does Jesus expand the notion of “neighbor” and make it universal?

### **Love of God and Love of Neighbor**

16. What difficulties does the Pope highlight with regard to loving God?
  - a. How does loving our neighbor relate to this problem?
17. In what ways does God reveal His invisible presence?
  - a. What does it mean to say that love is not merely a sentiment?
18. How do the saints renew their capacity to love God and neighbor?

## **Part II**

### **Caritas, the Practice of Love by the Church as a “Community of Love”**

#### **The Church’s Charitable Activity as a Manifestation of Trinitarian Love**

19. In what way (s) is the Spirit related to the *service of charity*?

#### **Charity as a Responsibility of the Church**

20. What is the essential core of the Church?
21. How and why did the first seven deacons come about?
22. What historical examples does the Pope provide to support the statement, “The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word”?
23. How does the story of St. Lawrence illustrate the world-view and duty of the Church?
24. How did Julian the Apostate attempt to imitate the Church? What does his story perhaps suggest to us about Church apologetics and evangelization to those outside her fold?
25. State and discuss the two facts the Pope highlights at this point in the Encyclical.

## **Justice and Charity**

26. What new objection to the Church emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century?
27. How did the Church respond to the new criticism?  
Do you own a copy of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*?
28. What is the aim and purpose of politics?  
a) What needs to happen for reason to be exercised properly?  
b) Where do politics and Christian faith meet?  
c) On what is the Church's social teaching based?  
d) What role does the Catholic faith play in politics?  
e) What role does love play in society?  
f) What does it mean to say man cannot live "by bread alone"?
29. What is the role of the lay faithful in building up society?

## **The Multiple Structures of Charitable Service in the Social Context of the Present Day**

30. What is the situation of the modern world with regard to mass communication and the new technologies that have, in effect, "narrowed" the world? What opportunities and challenges arise that are particular to our day and age?

## **The Distinctiveness of the Church-Charitable Activity**

31. What is distinctive about the charity of the Church?  
a) In what way is Marxism an "inhuman philosophy"?  
b) How is charity related to evangelization?

## **Those Responsible for the Church's Charitable Activity**

32. What is the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*?  
[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/index.htm)
33. What should be and what should not be the motivations for Christian charity?
34. What should be the animating force of the Christian?
35. Talk about the humility necessary for true Christian charity.
36. What two temptations appear when overwhelming needs are evident?
37. What is the relationship of prayer to Christian "charity"?
38. How can/should the Christian approach God in His silence and mystery?
39. How does hope relate to patience?

## Conclusion

40. In addition to the listed Saints, name and discuss some local examples of outstanding Christianity charity. What needs in the community are being met and what needs still exist?

41. Why is the Blessed Mother such a great example to all Christians?

42. How do Christian charity and the Church transcend this world?

### Supplemental Reading:

C.S. Lewis	<i>The Four Loves</i>
Karol Wojtyla	<i>Love and Responsibility</i>
Edward Sri	<i>Men, Women and the Mystery of Love: Practical Insights on John Paul II's Love and Responsibility</i>
Paul Quay, S.J.	<i>The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality</i>
Sister Timothy Prokes FSE	<i>Towards a Theology of the Body and Mutuality: The Human Image of Trinitarian Love</i>
Charles Rodgers S.J.	<i>An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching</i>
Pope John Paul II	<i>Centesimus Annus</i> Encyclical Letter
Pontifical Council	<i>Iustitia et Pax:</i> <i>Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine of the Church</i>
Albino Barrera	<i>Modern Catholic Social Documents and Political Economy</i>