

**Homily of the Archbishop of Paderborn at the Pontifical Mass  
On the occasion of the Beatification of Mother Maria Theresia  
Bonzel  
At Paderborn Cathedral on 10 November 2013**

(First Reading: Ex 3, 1-15; Second Reading: 2 Thess 2, 16-3, 5; Gospel: Lk 20, 27.34-38)

***The Blessed Mother Maria Theresia Bonzel – Example and Intercessor***

Your Most Reverend Eminence,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, in the Priesthood and in diaconal service,  
Dear Religious Sisters,  
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

If we conducted a survey on the street asking for the core of the Christian message, the answer “love of one’s neighbour” would probably gain a top ranking in this survey. Just because of this great importance and the high expectations directed to us we Christians have the mission to live this love of one’s neighbour and to defend it. If we are dealing with the love towards our neighbours we are also always dealing with their indestructible dignity and the value of human life on the whole.

By contrast I perceive tendencies in our society which do not grant this human dignity its appropriate position and which consider human dignity to be something insignificant and uninteresting. Indifference towards this subject matter, however, is anything but harmless! Together with the other citizens we Christians profess “*Human dignity shall be inviolable*” in our Basic Law. Why are we doing this? Is this a kind of agreement between people, a kind of social contract? We know: Contracts or agreements may be terminated, even those referring to human rights and human dignity. This is why some developments give me cause for great concern:

- I am referring to the great scandal of more than one hundred thousand abortions carried out every year in our country: Human beings – not just a cluster of cells! – who are destroyed even before they get the chance to see the light of day.
- I am thinking of the people who have reached the end of their life and who are entitled to dying with dignity: entitled to receiving a personal end-of-life care and not to a technically assisted dying.
- I am also thinking of the manifold attempts at manipulating the human genome with the daring aim to create the “new man” and thus taking the place of God, the Lord of life and death.

Although I am not a friend of polemic “black-white” thinking, I would like to express my grave concern in the name of Him, who is the guarantor of human dignity as such. As Christians we witness: For the sake of mankind God has inscribed the name of “Jesus” into our fragile human history. By the incarnation, the life and the works of His son, God has made a covenant with our human nature, which He sealed once and for all with His blood on the cross at Golgotha. This covenant is irrevocable on His part. As the dignity of the creature called “man” has its foundation in this covenant (just because of the creation) and is designed for eternity, it is beyond human control and is really sacrosanct.

According to our Jewish-Christian understanding the history of man is primarily a history of God in relation to the people. God and human beings can never be regarded separately from each other – they are always interrelated. This is why we never can speak of charity alone. It is written in the Bible that the love of one’s neighbour is inseparably linked to the love of God. For this reason we speak of the Double Commandment of Love which means that we are to love God and also our neighbours. Whoever wants to separate one half of the Commandment from the other, withdraws the foundation of the whole structure.

Sisters and brothers!

In our “newly” Blessed Mother Maria Theresia Bonzel we can see a woman who put this non-renounceable relationship of the love of God and to one’s neighbour into practice in an exemplary and ideal manner during her life – for this reason she has been raised to the altars today. It is a specific charism which she could draw from and which she taught her Congregation to take to heart: The Perpetual Adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament and the care of the sick and of people in need. Once she wrote in a letter: *“May the Holy Ghost ignite the fire of love in us and change us into new people as happened to the apostles, so that we may burn for the true love of God and practice this love more and more in the holy love to our neighbours.”*

Mother Maria Theresia knew it and she lived accordingly: The love of God and to one’s neighbour is mutually dependent. This is why the newly Blessed seems to us like a realization of the words taken from the Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas est* written by Pope Benedict XVI. In this letter we read: *“The Saints constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their encounter with the Eucharist Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first.”* (DCE 18)

The Saints and the Blessed of the Church, however, are not merely historical figures that lived once – even if they lived in an exemplary manner. If my information is

correct, the reformed Swiss theologian Walter Nigg created the following saying: Nothing is more vivid than a dead Saint. – If we take the example of the Saints we express the hope that we may also live our own life according to the Gospel. So what is the vivid message of the Blessed Maria Theresia Bonzel for the people of today? Again I would like to start with an observation – this time about ourselves: In the Church we talk much – mostly to each other, but more rarely about and with God. I think that in future it would be of great help to us, if we created more spaces which allow encounters with God. Perhaps it is too much to consider the following observation to be a trend, but during my visits to the parishes and in my talks especially to young Christians I have found out that in many places many people wish for more opportunities to practice the silent adoration of the Most Holy Sacrament. At places where respective initiatives have been taken, effects – sometimes hesitatingly, sometimes quite clearly – can be observed. What will we lose, if we try something like that? For it is not a fact that the prayer practiced correctly does distance man from man and takes him away from this world, out of touch with reality. On the contrary: Keeping our eyes fixed on the Lord and immersing ourselves in His love our eyes will be open for the here and now and for the people who need our help.

The Eucharist Adoration and the celebration of Holy Mass offer an opportunity to encounter God in its most intensive way. It is the different parts of the church service itself which like in a catechesis want to show us like eloquent signs important aspects of Christian life. Let me illustrate this with an example:

At the beginning of the great Eucharist Prayer the priest addresses the assembled congregation with the call: “Lift up your hearts!” – “Sursum corda!” In this call “Sursum corda!” we really find the most beautiful definition of a Christian. He is not merely “sum”, not only “I”, but if he tries to live truly, he will rise beyond himself “sursum”. As he turns his heart towards God, he also has a heart for the people entrusted to him. But in order to put his entire heart into the service to the people he again and again has to rest at the heart of Jesus Christ and listen to His heart tones in the Eucharist. Indeed we are only really able to discover Christ during our everyday life in the face of our neighbour, if we have recognised Him again and again in the humble and inconspicuous signs of bread and wine – so one of my spiritual companions maintains.

The church act of the Beatification of Mother Maria Theresia presents us a courageous disciple of Christ: A woman with a big heart who has experienced and witnessed the blood circulation of our faith. There are two movements which we theologially call “mission” and “gathering”; what we mean is the mission in our everyday life and the gathering to celebrate the Holy Mass.

Both movements must work properly, if a collapse is to be avoided. With her life and her work Mother Maria Theresia spells the following: Only those who love God with their whole heart can manage to interact fully with other people and not make them an instrument of their own self-assertion.

In view of many polarizations in the present Church I would like to recognise a remarkable advice in the life witness of the Blessed Mother Maria Theresia: Do not lose track of things by disputing whether the love of God or the love of one's neighbour or whether piety or charity have priority! Whoever wholeheartedly enters into a life with God can say like Mother Maria Theresia: "He leads, I follow."

If the God revealed in the Bible is a God for the people, which cannot really be comprehended in the end, then all followers of Jesus are called to prove the love of God by practising the true love of one's neighbour. –

Blessed Mother Maria Theresia Bonzel,  
pray for us!

Amen.