



OCTOBER 31, 2012, THE YEAR OF FAITH. THE FAITH OF THE CHURCH

The Catechesis of the Holy Father Benedict XVI during the Year of Faith



BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

SAINT PETER'S SQUARE
WEDNESDAY, 31 OCTOBER 2012

[VIDEO]

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let us continue on our journey of meditations on the Catholic faith. Last week I showed how faith is a gift, because it is God who takes the initiative and comes to meet us, and like this the faith is an answer by which we receive him as the permanent foundation of our life. It is a gift that changes our existence, because it makes us enter into Jesus' own vision, which works in us and opens us to love for God and for others.

Today I would like to take another step in our reflection, starting once more with a few questions: Does faith have a solely personal, individual nature? Does it concern only myself? Do I live my faith alone? Of course, the act of faith is an eminently personal act; it happens in the deepest part of us and signals a change in direction through personal conversion. It is my life that changes, that is given a new direction. In the Rite of Baptism, at the moment of the promises, the celebrant asks for a profession of the Catholic faith

and formulates three questions: Do you believe in God the Father Almighty? Do you believe in Jesus Christ his only Son? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? In ancient times these questions were addressed to the person who was to receive Baptism before being immersed three times in water. And today, too, the answer is one and the same: "I do". But this faith of mine is not the result of my own solitary reflection, it is not the product of my thought, it is the fruit of a relationship, a dialogue, in which there is a listener, a receiver and a respondent; it is communication with Jesus that draws me out of the "I" enclosed in myself to open me to the love of God, the Father. It is like a rebirth in which I am united not only to Jesus, but also to all those who have walked and are walking on the same path; and this new birth, that begins with Baptism, continues for the rest of my life. I cannot build my personal faith in a private dialogue with Jesus, because faith is given to me by God through a community of believers that is the Church and projects me into the multitude of believers, into a kind of communion that is not only sociological but rooted in the eternal love of God who is in himself the communion of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it is Trinitarian Love. Our faith is truly personal, only if it is also communal: it can be my faith only if it dwells in and moves with the "we" of the Church, only if it is our faith, the common faith of the one Church.

On Sunday, in the Holy Mass, reciting the "Creed", we speak in the first person, but we confess as one the one faith of the Church. That "I believe" said individually joins a vast chorus across time and space, in which each person contributes, so to speak, to the harmonious polyphony in faith. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sums this up in a clear way: thus, "believing" is an act of the Church. The Church's faith precedes, engenders, supports and nourishes our faith. The Church is the Mother of all believers. "No one can have God as his Father, who does not have the Church as his Mother" (St Cyprian) (n. 181). Therefore, the faith is born in the Church, leads to her and lives in her. This is important to remember.

At the start of the Christian adventure, when the Holy Spirit descends with power upon the disciples, on the day of Pentecost — as we read in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2:1-13) — the early Church receives the power to begin the mission entrusted to her by the Risen Lord: to spread the Gospel to every corner of the earth, the Good News of the Kingdom of God, and thus to lead every human person to the encounter with Him, to the faith that saves. The Apostles overcome every fear in proclaiming what they had heard, seen, personally experienced with Jesus. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they start to speak in tongues, openly announcing the mystery of which they were witnesses. In the Acts of the Apostles, we are told then of the great discourse that Peter gives on the day of Pentecost. He begins with a passage from the Prophet Joel (3:1-5), referring to Jesus, and proclaiming the central nucleus of the Christian faith: The One who had benefited all, who was attested to by God with mighty works, wonders and signs, who was nailed to the Cross and killed, but God raised him from the dead, making him Lord and Christ. With Him we have come into the ultimate salvation foretold by the Prophets and whoever invokes his name will be saved (cf. Acts 2:17-24). Listening to these words of Peter, many, who felt called personally, repented of their sins and were baptized receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:37-41). And so began the journey of the Church, the community that bears this proclamation through time and space, the community that is the People of God founded on the New Covenant thanks to the Blood of Christ. Her members do not belong to a particular social or ethnic group, but are men and women of every nation and culture. It is a "catholic" people, a people who speaks in tongues, universally open to welcoming all, beyond all boundaries, breaking down every barrier. St Paul says: "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11).

The Church, therefore, from the beginning is the place of faith, the place for the transmission of the faith, the place in which, through Baptism, we are immersed in the Pascal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection of Christ, who frees us from the slavery of sin, gives us the freedom of children and introduces us into communion with the Trinitarian God. At the same time, we are immersed in communion with other brothers and sisters of the faith, with the entire Body of Christ, brought out of our isolation. The Second Vatican

Ecumenical Council reminds us: "God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals without any mutual bonds but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness" (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9). Referring back again to the Rite of Baptism, we note that, at the end of the promises in which we voice our renunciation of evil and we repeat "I believe" to the truths of the faith, the celebrant declares: "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord". The faith is a theological virtue, given by God, but transmitted by the Church throughout history. St Paul himself, writing to the Corinthians, affirms he has communicated to them the Gospel that he too had received (cf. 1 Cor 15:3).

There is an unbroken chain in the life of the Church, in the proclamation of the Word of God, of the celebration of the Sacraments, that has come down to us and that we call Tradition. It gives us the guarantee that what we believe is the original message of Christ, preached by the Apostles. The nucleus of the primordial proclamation is the death and the Resurrection of the Lord, from which stems the entire patrimony of the faith. The Council says: "The apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved by a continuous line of succession until the end of time" (Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, n. 8). In this way, if Sacred Scripture contains the Word of God, the Tradition of the Church preserves it and faithfully transmits it, so that the men and women of every age might have access to its vast resources and be enriched by its treasures of grace. Thus, the Church, "in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes" (*ibid.*).

Lastly, I would like, to emphasize that it is in the ecclesial community that personal faith grows and matures. It is interesting to observe how in the New Testament the word "saints" designates Christians as a whole, and certainly not all would have qualified to be declared saints by the Church. What is meant, then, by this term? The fact that whoever had and lived the faith in Christ Risen were called to become a point of reference for all others, setting them in this way in contact with the Person and the Message of Jesus, who reveals the face of the Living God. And this holds true also for us: a Christian who lets himself be guided and gradually shaped by the faith of the Church, in spite of his weaknesses, his limitations and his difficulties, becomes like a window open to the light of the living God, receiving this light and transmitting it to the world. Blessed John Paul II in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* declared that "missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others" (n. 2).

Today's widespread tendency to relegate faith to the private sphere thus, contradicts its very nature. We need the Church in order to confirm our faith and in order to experience the gifts of God: his Word, the Sacraments, the support of grace and the witness of love. Like this, our "I" can be perceived in the "we" of the Church and, at the same time, be the recipient and the protagonist of an overwhelming event: experiencing communion with God, that is the foundation of communion among men. In a world in which individualism seems to rule personal relationships, making them ever more fragile, the faith calls us to be the People of God, to be Church, bearers of the love and communion of God for all mankind (cf. Pastoral Constitution *Guadium et Spes*, n. 1). Thank you for your attention.

To special groups:

Conscious of the devastation caused by the hurricane which recently struck the East Coast of the United States of America, I offer my prayers for the victims and express my solidarity with all those engaged in the work of rebuilding. I now greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, including those from England, Ireland, Sweden, Malaysia, Canada and the United States. My greetings go in particular to the group of

elders from Nigeria visiting Rome on pilgrimage, and to the members of the *Vox Clara* Committee. Upon all of you I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

Lastly a thought for the *young people*, the *sick* and *newlyweds*. Tomorrow we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints, which reminds us of the universal call to holiness: dear young people, may your hopes for happiness be realized in the Evangelical Beatitudes; dear sick people, may the cross that you carry with Christ sanctify you in his love; and you, dear newlyweds, may you know how to give the right space to prayer, so that your married life may be a journey to holiness. Thank you all.

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