



THE YEAR OF FAITH. INTRODUCTION

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



BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
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[Video]

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like to introduce the new series of Catecheses that will develop throughout the *Year of Faith* that has just begun and will interrupt — during this period — the series on the school of prayer. I announced this special Year in the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, precisely so that the Church might renew the enthusiasm of believing in Jesus Christ the one Saviour of the world, revive the joy of walking on the path he pointed out to us and bear a tangible witness to the transforming power of faith.

The 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council is an important opportunity to return to God, to deepen our faith and live it more courageously, and to strengthen our belonging to the Church, “teacher of humanity”. It is through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and works of charity that she guides us to meeting and knowing Christ, true God and true man. This is not an encounter with an idea or with a project of life, but with a living Person who transforms our innermost selves, revealing to us our true identity as children of God.

The encounter with Christ renews our human relationships, directing them, from day to day, to greater solidarity and brotherhood in the logic of love. Having faith in the Lord is not something that solely involves our intelligence, the area of intellectual knowledge; rather, it is a change that involves our life, our whole self: feelings, heart, intelligence, will, corporeity, emotions and human relationships. With faith everything truly changes, in us and for us, and our future destiny is clearly revealed, the truth of our vocation in history, the meaning of life, the pleasure of being pilgrims bound for the heavenly Homeland.

However — let us ask ourselves — is faith truly the transforming force in our life, in my life? Or is it merely one of the elements that are part of existence, without being the crucial one that involves it totally? With the Catecheses of this *Year of Faith* let us make a journey to reinforce or rediscover the joy of faith, in the knowledge that it is not something extraneous, detached from daily life, but is its soul. Faith in a God who is love, who makes himself close to man by incarnating himself and by giving himself on the Cross, who saves us and opens the doors of Heaven to us once again, clearly indicates that man's fullness consists solely in love.

This must be unequivocally reasserted today, when the cultural transformations under way frequently display so many forms of barbarity, passed off as "conquests of civilization". Faith affirms that there is no true humanity except in the places, actions, times and forms in which the human being is motivated by the love that comes from God. It is expressed as a gift and reveals itself in relationships full of love, compassion, attention and disinterested service to others. Wherever there is domination, possession, exploitation and the taking advantage of the other for selfish reasons wherever there is the arrogance of the ego withdrawn into the self, the human being is impoverished, debased and disfigured. The Christian faith, active in charity and strong in hope, does not limit but rather humanizes life, indeed, makes it fully human.

Faith means taking this transforming message to heart in our life, receiving the revelation of God who makes us know that he exists, how he acts and what his plans for us are. Of course, the mystery of God always remains beyond our conception and reason, our rites and our prayers. Yet, through his revelation, God actually communicates himself to us, recounts himself and makes himself accessible. And we are enabled to listen to his Word and to receive his truth. This, then, is the wonder of faith: God, in his love, creates within us — through the action of the Holy Spirit — the appropriate conditions for us to recognize his Word. God himself, in his desire to show himself, to come into contact with us, to make himself present in our history, enables us to listen to and receive him. St Paul expresses it with joy and gratitude in these words: "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13).

God has revealed himself with words and works throughout a long history of friendship with mankind which culminated in the Incarnation of the Son of God and in the Mystery of his death and Resurrection. God not only revealed himself in the history of a people, he not only spoke through the Prophets but he also crossed the threshold of his Heaven to enter our planet as a man, so that we might meet him and listen to him. And the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation spread from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The Church, born from Christ's side, became the messenger of a new and solid hope: Jesus of Nazareth Crucified and Risen, the Saviour of the world who is seated at the right hand of the Father and is the judge of the living and the dead. This is the kerygma the central, explosive proclamation of faith. However the problem of the "rule of faith" has been posed from the outset, in other words the problem of believers' faithfulness to the truth of the Gospel, which to be firmly anchored, to the saving truth about God and man that must be preserved and passed down. St Paul wrote: "I preached to you the Gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast — unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor 15:2).

But where can we find the essential formula of faith? Where can we find the truths that have been faithfully passed down to us and that constitute the light for our daily life? The answer is simple. In the Creed, in the Profession of Faith or Symbol of Faith, we are reconnected with the original event of the Person and history of Jesus of Nazareth; what the Apostle to the Gentiles said to the Christians of Corinth happens: “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-5).

Today too the Creed needs to be better known, understood and prayed. It is important above all that the Creed be, so to speak, “recognized”. Indeed, knowing might be merely an intellectual operation, whereas “recognizing” means the need to discover the deep bond between the truth we profess in the Creed and our daily existence, so that these truths may truly and in practice be — as they have always been — light for our steps through life, water that irrigates the parched stretches on our path, life that gets the better of some arid areas of life today. The moral life of Christians is grafted on the Creed, on which it is founded and by which it is justified.

It is not by chance that Blessed John Paul II wanted the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a reliable norm for teaching the faith and a dependable source for a renewed catechesis, to be based on the Creed. It was a question of confirming and preserving this central core of the truths of the faith and of rendering it in a language that would be more comprehensible to the people of our time, to us. It is a duty of the Church to transmit the faith, to communicate the Gospel, so that the Christian truths may be a light in the new cultural transformations and that Christians may be able to account for the hope that is in them (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). Today we are living in a society in constant movement, one that has changed radically, even in comparison with the recent past.

The processes of secularization and a widespread nihilistic mentality in which all is relative have deeply marked the common mindset. Thus life is often lived frivolously, with no clear ideals or well-founded hopes, and within fluid and temporary social ties. Above all the new generations are not taught the truth nor the profound meaning of existence that surmounts the contingent situation, nor permanent affections and trust. Relativism leads, on the contrary, to having no reference points, suspicion and volubility break up human relations, while life is lived in brief experiments without the assumption of responsibility.

If individualism and relativism seem to dominate the minds of many of our contemporaries, it cannot be said that believers are completely immune to these dangers, with which we are confronted in the transmission of the faith. The investigation promoted on all the continents through the celebration of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, has highlighted some of them: a faith lived passively and privately, the rejection of education in the faith, the gap between life and faith.

Christians often do not even know the central core of their own Catholic faith, the Creed, so that they leave room for a certain syncretism and religious relativism, blurring the truths to believe in as well as the salvific uniqueness of Christianity. The risk of fabricating, as it were, a “do-it-yourself” religion is not so far off today. Instead we must return to God, to the God of Jesus Christ, we must rediscover the Gospel message and make it enter our consciences and our daily life more deeply.

In the Catecheses of this *Year of Faith* I would like to offer some help for achieving this journey for taking up and deepening knowledge of the central truths of our faith, concerning God, man, the Church, about the whole social and cosmic reality, by meditating and reflecting on the affirmations of the Creed. And I would like it to be clear that this content or truth of faith (*fides quae*) bears directly our life; it asks for a conversion of life that gives life to a new way of believing in God (*fides qua*). Knowing God, meeting him, deepening our knowledge of the features of his face is vital for our life so that he may enter into the profound dynamics of the human being.

May the journey we shall be making this year enable us all to grow in faith, in love of Christ, so that in our daily decisions and actions we may learn to live the good and beautiful life of the Gospel. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I offer a warm welcome to the Muslim and Catholic study group from the Diocese of Broken Bay in Australia. I also greet the representatives of the Jewish Federation of North America and the participants in the European Conference of the American Bankruptcy Institute. I thank the Cathedral Choir from Oslo and the Hawaiian dancers for their performances. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present, including those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Jersey, Norway, Australia, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Canada and the United States, I invoke God's abundant blessings.

Lastly, I address a special thought to the *sick*, the *newlyweds* and the *young people*, among whom I greet in particular the confirmands of the Diocese of Faenza-Modigliana, accompanied by Bishop Claudio Stagni. Thank you. Thank you for your enthusiasm! The liturgy today has us celebrate the Memorial of St Ignatius of Antioch, a Pastor on fire with love for Christ. May this feast help everyone to rediscover the joy of being Christian. I pray that the Lord's goodness and mercy may comfort your hope, *young people*, that it may console your suffering, *sick people* and strengthen your mutual love, *newlyweds*.

My thanks to you all.

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