



THE YEAR OF FAITH: WHAT IS FAITH?

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



BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Saint Peter's Square
Wednesday, 24 October 2012*

[VIDEO]

THE YEAR OF FAITH: WHAT IS FAITH?

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last Wednesday, with the beginning of the *Year of Faith*, I started a new series of catecheses on faith. And today I would like to reflect with you on a fundamental question: What is faith? Does faith still make sense in a world in which science and technology have unfolded horizons unthinkable until a short time ago? What does believing mean today? In fact, in our time we need a renewed education in the faith that includes, of course, knowledge of its truths and of the history of salvation, but that is born above all from a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ, from loving him, from trusting him, so that the whole of our life becomes involved.

Today, together with so many signs of goodness a certain spiritual desert is also developing around us. At times we get sort of feeling, from certain events we have news of every day, that the world is not moving towards the building of a more brotherly and

peaceful community; the very ideas of progress and wellbeing have shadows too. Despite the greatness of scientific discoveries and technological triumphs, human beings today do not seem to have become truly any freer or more human; so many forms of exploitation, manipulation, violence, abuse and injustice endure.... A certain kind of culture, moreover, has taught people to move solely within the horizon of things, of the feasible, to believe only in what they can see and touch with their own hands. Yet the number of those who feel bewildered is also growing, and search to go beyond a merely horizontal view of reality they are prepared to believe in everything and nothing.

In this context certain fundamental questions reemerge that are far weightier than they seem at first sight. What is life's meaning? Is there a future for humanity, for us and for the generations to come? In which direction should we orient our free decisions for a good and successful outcome in life? What awaits us beyond the threshold of death?

From these irrepressible questions it becomes clear how the world of planning, of precise calculation and of experimentation, in a word the knowledge of science, although important for human life is not enough on its own. We do not only need bread, we need love, meaning and hope, a sound foundation, a solid terrain that helps us to live with an authentic meaning even in times of crisis, in darkness, in difficulty, and with our daily problems. Faith gives us precisely this: it is a confident entrustment to a "You", who is God, who gives me a different certitude, but no less solid than that which comes from precise calculation or from science. Faith is not a mere intellectual assent of the human person to specific truths about God; it is an act with which I entrust myself freely to a God who is Father and who loves me; it is adherence to a "You" who gives me hope and trust.

Of course, this adherence to God is not without content; with it we are aware that God has shown himself to us in Christ, he has made us see his face and has made himself really close to each one of us. Indeed, God has revealed that his love for man, for each one of us, is boundless: on the Cross, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God made man, shows us in the clearest possible way how far this love reaches, even to the gift of himself, even to the supreme sacrifice. With the mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection, God plumbs to the depths of our humanity to bring it back to him, to uplift it to his heights. Faith is believing in this love of God that is never lacking in the face of human wickedness, in the face of evil and death, but is capable of transforming every kind of slavery, giving us the possibility of salvation. Having faith, then, is meeting this "You", God, who supports me and grants me the promise of an indestructible love that not only aspires to eternity but gives it; it means entrusting myself to God with the attitude of a child, who knows well that all his difficulties, all his problems are understood in the "you" of his mother. And this possibility of salvation through faith is a gift that God offers all men and women. I think we should meditate more often — in our daily life, marked by problems and at times by dramatic situations — on the fact that believing in a Christian manner means my trusting abandonment to the profound meaning that sustains me and the world, that meaning that we are unable to give to each other but can only receive as a gift, and that is the foundation on which we can live without fear. And we must be able to proclaim this liberating and reassuring certainty of faith with words and show it by living our life as Christians.

However, we see around us every day that many remain indifferent or refuse to accept this proclamation. At the end of Mark's Gospel we heard harsh words from the Risen One who says: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:16), loses himself. I would like to invite you to reflect on this.

Trust in the action of the Holy Spirit must always impel us to go and preach the Gospel, to the courageous witness of faith; but, in addition to the possibility of making a positive response to the gift of faith, there is also the risk of rejecting the Gospel, of not accepting the vital encounter with Christ. St Augustine was already posing this problem in one of his commentaries on the Parable of the Sower. "We speak", he said, "we cast the seed, we scatter the seed. There are those who deride us, those who reproach us, those who mock at us. If we fear them we have nothing left to sow and on the day of reaping we will be left without a harvest. Therefore may the seed in the good soil sprout" (*Discourse on*

Christian Discipline, 13,14: PL 40, 677-678). Rejection, therefore, cannot discourage us. As Christians we are evidence of this fertile ground. Our faith, even with our limitations, shows that good soil exists, where the seed of the Word of God produces abundant fruits of justice, peace and love, of new humanity, of salvation. And the whole history of the Church, with all the problems, also shows that good soil exists, that the good seed exists and bears fruit.

Yet, let us ask ourselves: where can man find that openness of heart and mind to believe in God who made himself visible in Jesus Christ who died and Rose, to receive God's salvation so that Christ and his Gospel might be the guide and the light of our existence? The answer: we can believe in God because he comes close to us and touches us, because the Holy Spirit, a gift of the Risen One, enables us to receive the living God. Thus faith is first of all a supernatural gift, a gift of God.

The Second Vatican Council says: "Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior help of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and 'makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth'" (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*, n. 5).

Our journey starts from Baptism, the sacrament that gives us the Holy Spirit, making us become children of God in Christ, and marks our entry into the community of faith, into the Church: one does not believe by oneself, without the prior intervention of the grace of the Holy Spirit, one does not believe alone, but together with one's brethren. As from Baptism every believer is called to new life, and to make this confession of faith his or her own, together with the brethren.

Faith is a gift of God, but it is also a profoundly free and human act. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says so clearly: "Believing is possible only by grace and the interior help of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act... contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason" (n. 154). Indeed, it involves them and uplifts them in a gamble for life that is like an exodus, that is, a coming out of ourselves, from our own certainties, from our own mental framework, to entrust ourselves to the action of God who points out to us his way to achieve true freedom, our human identity, true joy of the heart, peace with everyone. Believing means entrusting oneself in full freedom and joyfully to God's providential plan for history, as did the Patriarch Abraham, as did Mary of Nazareth. Faith, then, is an assent with which our mind and our heart say their "yes" to God, confessing that Jesus is Lord. And this "yes" transforms life, unfolds the path toward fullness of meaning, thereby making it new, rich in joy and trustworthy hope.

Dear friends, our time needs Christians who have been grasped by Christ, who grow in faith through their familiarity with Sacred Scripture and the sacraments. People who are, as it were, an open book that tells of the experience of new life in the Spirit, of the presence of that God who supports us on our way and opens us to everlasting life. Many thanks.

To special groups:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I offer a cordial greeting to the General Chapter of the Salvatorian Sisters. I also greet the large group of pilgrims from Japan. My warm welcome goes to the priests from the Archdiocese of Westminster. I welcome the members of the Apostolic Union of Clergy. I also greet the study group of Anglican clergy visiting Rome. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present, including those from England, Scotland, Denmark, Norway, Nigeria, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Canada and the United States, I invoke God's blessings.

Lastly a thought for the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Last Monday we celebrated the Memorial of Blessed John Paul II, whose figure is ever present among us: dear *young people*, learn to face life with his zeal and enthusiasm; dear *sick people*, carry the cross of suffering with joy as he himself was able to teach us; and you, dear *newlyweds*, always put God at the centre, so that your life as a married couple may have greater love and greater happiness.

And now, with great joy I announce that on 24 November I shall hold a Consistory at which I will appoint six new Members of the College of Cardinals.

Cardinals have the task of helping the Successor of Peter in carrying out his Ministry of strengthening his brethren in the faith and of being the principle and foundation of the unity and communion of the Church.

The names of the new Cardinals are:

1. Archbishop JAMES MICHAEL HARVEY, Prefect of the Pontifical Household, whom I intend to name Archpriest of the Papal Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls;
2. H.B. BÉCHARA BOUTROS RAÏ, OMM, Patriarch of Antioch for Maronites, Lebanon;
3. H.B. BASELIOS CLEEMIS THOTTUNKAL, Major Archbishop of Trivandrum for Syro-Malankaras, India;
4. Archbishop JOHN OLORUNFEMI ONAIYEKAN, of Abuja, Nigeria;
5. Archbishop RUBÉN SALAZAR GÓMEZ, Archbishop of Bogotá, Colombia;
6. Archbishop LUIS ANTONIO G. TAGLE of Manila, the Philippines.

The new Cardinals — as you have heard — carry out their ministry at the service of the Holy See or as Fathers and Pastors of the particular Churches in various parts of the world.

I ask everyone to pray for the newly appointed Cardinals, as I invoke the motherly intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, that they may always assiduously love Christ and his Church with courage and dedication.

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