

Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*
For the Indiction of the Year of Faith
Pope Benedict XVI, October 11, 2011

Summary Notes

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1. Door of Faith

- “always open for us”, ushers us into “life of communion with God”; offers “entry into [God’s] Church.
- faith is threshold crossed in heart’s response – “shaped by transforming grace” – to the proclaimed word of God
- entering is beginning of “lifetime journey”
 - beginning at baptism “through which we can address God as Father”
 - ending “passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory.”
- professing faith in Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) = believing in God who is love (1Jn 4:8):
 - Father sent Son “in fullness of time for our salvation”
 - Jesus Christ, who redeemed world by mystery of his death & resurrection
 - Holy Spirit, who leads Church across centuries as we await Christ’s return in glory.

2. Need to Rediscover Journey of Faith

- necessary to shed clear light on joy, renewed enthusiasm of encounter with Christ
- role of Church, Pastors like Christ – to lead people out of desert
 - to place of life
 - “towards friendship with the Son of God who gives us life ... in abundance.”
- Christian belief in faith commitment as presupposition for life in society with social, cultural, political consequences can no longer be taken for granted, “often openly denied.”
- unity between faith and social values (“unitary matrix”) absent in “large swathes of society” due to “profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.”

3. Need to Rediscover Taste for our Faith

- “we cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden” (Mt 5: 13-16)
- people can still experience need “to go to the well” like Samaritan woman to hear Jesus:
 - “who invites us to believe in him”
 - who invites us “to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him.” (Jn 4:14)
- need to rediscover taste for
 - feeding ourselves on word of God
 - feeding ourselves on bread of life (offered by Christ as sustenance for his disciples

(Jn 6: 51)

- need to heed Jesus' call to "labour for the food which endures to eternal life." (Jn 6: 27)
- today's needed question same as asked by his listeners: "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" (Jn 6: 28) Jesus' reply, to "believe in him whom he has sent." (Jn 6: 29)
- "Belief in Jesus Christ... is the way to arrive definitively at salvation."

4. **Response: Announcing Year of Faith (Oct 11, 2012 – Nov 24, 2013)**

- Start: October 11, 2012:
 - 50th Anniversary of Second Vatican Council
 - 20th Anniversary of Catechism of Catholic Church
 - fruit of Vatican II
 - requested by bishops at 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops as "an Instrument at the service of catechesis."
- End: Nov 24, 2013, Feast of Christ the King
- October 2012 General Assembly of Synod of Bishops theme:
 - "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith"
- *Year of Faith* will be time to usher Church into reflection on rediscovery of the faith.
- 1967 Year of Faith
 - proclaimed by Pope Paul VI to commemorate witness of St. Peter & Paul's Martyrdom
 - solemn moment for whole Church to make "authentic and sincere profession of the same faith":
 - profession that was personal, free, conscious, individual, collective, Inward, outward, humble, frank
 - to reappropriate exact knowledge of faith to reinvigorate, purify, confirm, confess it.
 - concluded with *Credo of the People of God* – showing need for believers to confirm, understand, explore and bear contemporary witness to "essential content" of heritage of all believers.

5. **Opportunity to Correctly Understand Second Vatican Council**

- Year of Faith seen as Pope Paul VI as "consequence and necessity of the postconciliar period."
 - in light of grave difficulties of time, esp. re profession and correct interpretation of true faith.
- 50th Anniversary of Vatican II a good opportunity to understand Council,
 - whose texts "have lost nothing of their value or brilliance" (JP II)
 - whose texts "need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as normative texts of the Church's Magisterium within the Church's Tradition" (JP II)
 - "the great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20th century" ... "a sure compass by which we take our bearings in the century now beginning." (JP II)
 - can become increasingly powerful for Church's "ever necessary renewal" if Properly interpreted and implemented

6. Church's Renewal via Witness of Believers' Lives

- called to radiate Christ's word of truth "by their very existence in the world":
 - "While Christ, 'holy, innocent and undefiled' (Heb 7: 26) knew nothing of sin (cf. 2Cor 5: 21), but came only to expiate the sins of the people (cf. Heb 2: 17) ... the Church ... clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal. The Church, 'like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God', announcing the cross and death of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1Cor 11: 26). But by the power of the risen Lord it is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, its sorrow and its difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that it may reveal in the world, faithfully, although with shadows, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it shall be manifested in full light." (Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 8)
- from above perspective, *Year of Faith* is a "summons to authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world."
 - whose love and call to conversion through forgiveness of sins is fully revealed in mystery of Christ's death and resurrection:
 - we are "buried" and raised with Christ in Baptism to "walk in newness of life." (Rom 6: 4).
 - through faith, this new life in Christ, "shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the resurrection."
 - this shaping of our existence, through human cooperation brings purification, transformation to humanity's "thoughts, affections, mentality and conduct on a journey that is never completely finished in this life.
 - "Faith working through love" (Gal 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of [human] life." (cf. Rom 12:2; Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:20-29; 2 Cor5:17)

7. Faith Lived as an Experience of Love

- "*Caritas Christi urget nos*" [*the love of Christ urges us*] (2Cor 5:14). Christ's love fills our hearts and urges us to evangelize. He sends us today to proclaim his Gospel to all the earth's peoples. (cf. Mt 28: 19)
- "Through his love, Jesus Christ attracts to himself people of every generation":
 - he convokes the Church in every age, entrusts her with an "ever new" mandate to proclaim the Gospel.
- today, stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization is needed "in order to Rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith."
- rediscovering Christ's love "day by day" gives "force and vigour that can never fade away" to believers' missionary commitment.
- Faith grows...

- “when it is lived as an experience of love received and
- when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.”
- Faith makes us fruitful because it ...
 - “expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness”
 - opens listening hearts and minds to Christ’s invitation “to adhere to his word and become his disciples”
- E.g., St. Augustine of Hippo
 - “believers...strengthen themselves by believing.”
 - his life search for the beauty of faith continued until his heart rested in God
 - his extensive writings explaining “importance of believing and the truth of faith”
 - continued “heritage of incomparable riches”
 - still help many searching for God “to find the right path towards ‘door of faith.’
- “Only through believing, then, does faith grow and become stronger; there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one’s life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God.”

8. Making a Public Profession of Faith

- Pope invites brother bishops to join him “in this time of spiritual grace that the Lord offers us, In recalling the precious gift of faith. We want to celebrate this Year in a worthy and fruitful manner.”
 - through intensified “reflection on the faith” to “help all believers in Christ acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing.”
- “We will have the opportunity to express our faith...
 - in our cathedrals and in the churches of the whole world;
 - in our homes and among our families
 - so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times.”
- Following groups are to find a way “to make a public profession of the *Credo*” during Year –
 - Religious communities
 - parish communities
 - all ecclesial bodies old and new.

9. Owning the Faith Professed, Celebrated, Lived and Prayed

- Pope Benedict wants “this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to *profess* the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope.”
- Year “will also be a good opportunity to intensify the celebration of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist,” ... source and summit of our Christian life. (SC 10)
- Pope’s prayer that “believers’ *witness* of life may grow in credibility.
- Every believer must make it their personal task to
 - “rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed,

- and to reflect on the act of faith.”
- Early Christians “were required to learn the creed from memory.” - a daily prayer “not to forget” Baptismal commitment.
- St. Augustine homily, *redditio symboli*, the handing over of the creed:
 - creed recited are words on which Church is built above foundation of Christ the Lord.
 - keep its words ever present in mind and hearts – repeating, recalling at all times, Keeping watch over with our hearts.

10. Faith: Believing by Grace, Assenting in Freedom

- Section sketches “a path to help us understand...content of the faith” and act of entrustment to God in freedom. I.e., Act of believing and content to which we give assent.
 - E.g., St. Paul: “One believes with the heart and so is justified, and one , and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” (NRSV)
 - Heart indicates first act (by which we come to faith) is God’s gift, “the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within.”
 - E.g., Lydia – “the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul.” (Ac 16:14)
 - shows us that the heart, “the authentic sacred space within the person,” must be “opened by grace” to see “below the surface and understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God.” Knowledge of faith’s contents alone is not sufficient.
- “Confessing with the lips indicates ... that faith implies public testimony and commitment.”
 - belief not a private act
 - “[f]aith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him” which “points Towards an understanding of the reasons for believing.”
 - as a free act, faith “demands social responsibility for what one believes.”
 - E.g., Pentecost and Church’s fearless public profession of faith to all.
 - gift of Holy Spirit...
 - “makes us fit for mission and
 - strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous.”
- Faith as personal and communitarian:
 - “I believe is the faith of the Church professed personally by each believer, principally during Baptism.”
 - “We believe is the faith of the Church confessed by the bishops assembled in council or more generally by the liturgical assembly of believers.” The Church, our mother, responds to God by faith “as she teaches us to say both ‘I believe’ and ‘we believe’.” (CCC 167)
- Regarding Assent:
 - “knowledge of the content of faith is essential for giving one’s own *assent*, that is ...for adhering fully with intellect and will to what the Church proposes. Knowledge of

faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God.

The giving of assent implies that, when we believe, we freely accept the whole mystery of faith, because the guarantor of its truth is God who reveals himself and allows us to know his mystery of love.

- Sincerely searching for ultimate meaning and definitive truth “in our cultural context”
 - many in this category “not claiming to have the gift of faith”
 - “This search is an authentic ‘preamble’ to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God.”
 - seen in human reason’s inner demand for “what is perennially valid and lasting.”
 - “This demand constitutes a permanent summons, indelibly written into the human heart, to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had he not already set out to meet us. To this encounter, faith invites us and it opens us in fullness.”

11. **Rediscovering Fundamental Content of the Faith as Set Out in *Catechism***

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*
 - a “precious and indispensable tool” for arriving at systematic knowledge of the content of the faith.
 - “one of the most important fruits of the Second Vatican Council.”
 - “will make a very important contribution to the work of renewing the whole life of the Church... a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.” (quote from JP II, Apostolic Const. *Fidei Depositum*, signed at 30th anniversary of Vatican II) -
 - Catechism (CCC) a “systematic and organic synthesis” of Catholic faith
 - the “wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed,
 - drawing on Scripture, Fathers of the Church, teaching of theological masters and saints.
 - CCC a “permanent record” of the Church’s meditation on her faith and progress in doctrine, “to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith.”

Structure of the CCC

- “follows the development of the faith right up to the great themes of daily life”
- not theory, but “an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church.”
- Profession of Faith => Sacramental Life (where Christ “present, operative and continues to build his Church.”
- Profession of faith and Christian witness needs support of the grace of liturgy and sacraments; so too, the CCC’s teaching on the moral life “acquires its full meaning if placed in relationship with faith, liturgy and prayer.”

12. **CDF Note –Guideline on Effective & Appropriate Ways to Live Year of Faith**

- CCC will serve as tool to support the faith of Christians, esp those in Christian formation, “so crucial in our cultural context.”
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) invited by Holy Father to draw up a “Note”

with guidelines “on how to live this Year of Faith in the most effective and appropriate ways, at the service of belief and evangelization.”

- Changed mentality and Questions to faith:
 - based on limiting rational certainties to scientific and technological discoveries.
 - Church has never been afraid of demonstrating there is no “conflict between faith and genuine science, because both ... tend towards the truth.”

13. Decisive Importance of Retracing the History of Our Faith

- a mystery of interweaved holiness and sin, of holy men and women’s witness and provocation to “the sincere and continuing work of conversion ... to experience the mercy of the Father, held out to everyone.” -
- we will need to keep eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12: 12), and fulfillment of all longing and anguish of the human heart.
- Jesus’ Incarnation, sharing in and transforming our weakness by his death & resurrection – the fulfillment of
 - the joy of love,
 - the drama of suffering and pain,
 - forgiveness for offenses received
 - the victory of life over the emptiness of death.
- in Jesus, “who died and rose again for our salvation” the “examples of faith [-filled people] in these “2000 years of our salvation history are brought into the fullness of light.”
 - Mary:
 - accepted Angel’s word “and believed she was to become the Mother of God in the obedience of her devotion.”
 - visits Elizabeth praising God for “marvels he worked in those who trust him. (cf. Lk 1: 46-55)
 - gave birth to her only son, “with joy and trepidation”, “keeping her virginity intact.”
 - trusted in Joseph as they fled to Egypt from Herod’s persecution
 - “With the same faith, she followed the Lord in his preaching and remained with him all the way to Golgotha. (cf. Jn 19: 25-27)
 - “By faith, Mary tasted the first fruits of Jesus’ resurrection, and treasuring every memory in her heart, she passed them on to the Twelve assembled with her in the Upper Room to receive the Holy Spirit.” (cf. Acts 1: 14; 2: 1-4)
 - Apostles:
 - “By faith, ... left everything to follow their Master.” (cf. Mk 10: 28)
 - believed Jesus words proclaiming Kingdom of God present and fulfilled in his person. (cf. Lk 11: 20)