

Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei* Pope Benedict XVI

Executive Summary

Tony Cosentino Renfrew County Catholic School Board October 15, 2012

1. (The Door of Faith)

The “Door of Faith” is always open to usher us into a life of communion with God and entry into God’s Church. Our heart’s response by grace to the Word of God allows us to cross its threshold to a lifetime journey that begins at Baptism and ends in our share in the risen Christ’s glory.

Professing faith in the Trinity = believing in a God who is Love:

- Father (who sent the Son to save us),
- Son (who redeemed us) and
- Holy Spirit (who leads the Church across the centuries as we await Christ’s return in glory)

2. (Need to Rediscover Journey of Faith)

Pope BXVI has constantly spoken of “the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ.”

- Role of Church/Pastors like that of Christ: to lead people out of the desert to a place of life, abundantly life-giving friendship with Christ.

The Desert:

- Christian belief in faith 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 life no longer present “in large swathes of society” due to a “profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.”

3. (Need to Rediscover Taste for our Faith)

We need to rediscover our “taste” for our faith, lest like *salt* that is hidden, it become tasteless (Mt 5: 13). People can still experience the need to draw from the well of Christ’s “living water” (Jn 4), to feed themselves on God’s word and the bread of life, and labour for “food that endures to eternal life” (Jn 6:27), believing in “him whom [God] has sent” (Jn 6:29) to sustain us as Christ’s disciples, and arrive at salvation.

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

Year of Faith (Oct 11th, 2012 to Nov 24th, 2013). Oct 11, 2012

- 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council
- 20th Anniversary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church

October 7-28, 2012 General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”

- **Year of faith will usher Church into reflection on and rediscovery of the faith** as it did during the 1967 Year of Faith proclaimed by Pope Paul VI – see *Porta Fidei* for details

5. (Opportunity to Correctly Understand Second Vatican Council)

Year of Faith an opportunity to correctly understand the Second Vatican Council:

- “the great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20th Century.” (Pope JP II)
- “a sure compass” to guide the Church in the new millennium; (Pope JP II)
- can become increasingly powerful for the Church’s “ever necessary renewal” if properly interpreted and implemented.

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

The Church is a pilgrim, at once holy and embracing its sinful members, constantly needing purification and renewal, announcing the Gospel in the power of the Risen Lord, empowered by her Risen Lord, until his return. Therefore, *the Year of Faith is "a summons to authentic conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world."*

- Through faith, our new life in the risen Christ, shapes our life, transforming our whole being. "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; 2Cor5:17)

7. (Faith Lived as an Experience of Love)

The love of Christ in our lives urges us to spread his Gospel through the witness of love as his disciples. **Greater Church commitment is needed to the new evangelization to help all "rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith."** Faith becomes fruitful when it is experienced in love, communicated as an experience "of grace and joy." Faith expands our hearts in hope through love live as Christ's disciples. E.g., St. Augustine of Hippo, whose life search for beauty and meaning continued until his heart rested in God. Augustine tells us that believers "strengthen themselves by believing." Augustine's rich works still speak to the many who search for God and the path toward the door of faith. Believing and self-abandonment to God is our way to grow and be strengthened in faith.

8. (Making a Public Profession of Faith)

The Pope invites bishops to join him in celebrating and reflecting on the faith – to help all believers adhere to the Gospel in this time "profound change" for humanity:

- in cathedrals, churches, homes, families;
- to help Religious communities, parish communities and all ecclesial bodies "make a public profession of the Credo" during the Year.

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" their **Baptismal commitment.**

10. (Faith: Believing by Grace, Assenting in Freedom)

Faith is a free act of entrustment to God – *I believe and accept this, the content of the faith.* E.g., St. Paul: *believing in the heart and justified; confessing with the mouth and saved.* (Rom 10: 10). Faith begins in the heart, which must be opened by God's grace to move beyond knowledge of the faith's contents and truly understand what is being proclaimed as the word of God. **Faith is a free choice to stand with Christ and live with him.** An act that is not private, but **involves public witness and social responsibility** (e.g., Church's fearless public proclamation of faith at Pentecost in Acts 2). Faith therefore is:

- **personal and communitarian** (i.e., confessed by the individual and believing community [Church]): Both *I* believe and *We* believe – involving “**assent**” (**adherence**) to the faith confessed and **taught by the Church**, our Mother, who responds to God in faith, and teaches us to say, “**I believe and we believe.**”
- Faith invites those searching for meaning (the preamble to faith written on every human heart), to **meet the God who sets out to meet us in our seeking.**

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

Porta Fidei presents the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, signed at the 30th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, as a “**precious and indispensable tool**” for arriving at a “**systematic knowledge**” of the faith’s contents, “to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith.” As “**one of the most important fruits of the Second Vatican Council,**” its wealth will be invaluable in the Church’s renewal of faith, as it “follows the development of the faith right up to the great themes of daily life” in its structure, which ...

- begins with *The Profession of Faith (the Apostle's Creed)*,
- followed by *The Celebration of the Christian Mystery* (Liturgy and especially, the Sacraments)
- moving on to *Life in Christ* (including the Ten Commandments)
- and *Christian Prayer* (including The Lord's Prayer)
- * Often referred to as the “Four Pillars” of the Faith.

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

Holy Father asked Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) 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.**” This is especially needed in this time where rational certainty is limited to scientific and technological discoveries. True faith and science oriented toward truth, do not conflict.

13. (Decisive Importance of Retracing the History of Our Faith)

It will be **important to retrace the history of our faith, with eyes fixed on Jesus Christ**, “pioneer and perfecter of our faith,” **fulfillment of every heart’s longing and anguish** by his death and resurrection.

We have the **examples of faith in our history:**

- **Mary:** believing the angel’s word, praising God, becoming mother of the Saviour, trusting Joseph to flee to Egypt, following Christ all the way to Golgotha, tasting the first fruits of Jesus’ resurrection, passing on her faith to the Twelve assembled with her to receive the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1)
- **Apostles:** leaving everything to follow Christ, believing in the Kingdom in Christ’s words and person, living in community with Jesus, proclaiming Gospel to whole world.
- **Disciples:** forming first community around Apostles’ teaching, celebration of Eucharist with possessions held in common to meet needs of all.
- **Martyrs:** giving their lives in witness to the Gospel’s truth, that had transformed and made them capable of forgiving their persecutors.
- **Consecrated Men and Women:** consecrating “their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind to live in obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity [as] concrete signs of waiting for the Lord.”
- **Countless Christians:** promoting “action for justice” putting into practice Christ’s proclamation of “deliverance from oppression and a year of favour for all.” (cf. Lk 4: 18-19)
- **Men and Women of all Ages:** whose names are written in the book of life (Rev 7: 19), and have borne witness to Christ “in the family, ...workplace, public life...”

- **We too:** “by our living recognition of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in our history.”

14. Year of Opportunity to Intensify our Witness of Charity

- Year will be a **good time to intensify our witness to faith in works of charity:**
 - “...the greatest of these is love.” (1Cor 13:3); “faith, if it has no works, is dead.” (Jas 2: 14-18)
 - **faith and charity require one another to enable each “to set out on its respective path.”**
 - the **fruit of faith is charity**
 - **charity guided by faith *is not* at the mercy of doubt**
 - **faith enables us to see Christ in “the least of these” (see Mt. 25: 40), and to serve him in our neighbour, in our commitment to the world.**

15. (Constancy of Credible Witness, Reliance on Christ, Entrustment to Mother of God)

- we are **encouraged to be constant in our faith**, which...
 - enables us “**to perceive**, ever anew, the **marvels that God works for us**”,
 - makes us intent on **reading the signs of the times and becoming “a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world”**,
- **world particularly needs “credible witnesses”** who are “enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.”

(Closing Words)

- ““That the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph” (2 Th 3:1): **may this Year of Faith make our relationship with Christ the Lord increasingly firm, since only in him is there the certitude for looking to the future and the guarantee of an authentic and lasting love.**”
- The Holy Father closes, referring to St. Peter's encouragement to the first Christians who "may have to suffer various trials" without having seen Christ, but believing in him, rejoice, obtaining as "the outcome of [their] faith...the salvation of [their] souls" (1Pet 1:6-9) as a “ray of light” to shed on the nature of Christian faith.
- The Holy Father continues - **the Christian life of faith is one of joy and suffering** – e.g., of saints living in solitude; of believers “tested by God’s silence, rather than hearing God’s consoling voice.” **Life’s trials help us**
 - understand the mystery of the cross, and
 - participate in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24)
 - and find strength in Christ in our weakness (2Cor 12:10), “as a prelude to the joy and hope to which faith leads.
- “**We believe with firm certitude that the Lord Jesus has conquered evil and death.** With this sure confidence **we entrust ourselves to him:** he, present in our midst, **overcomes the power of the evil one** (cf. Lk 11:20); and the Church, the visible community of his mercy, abides in him as a sign of definitive reconciliation with the Father.”
- “**Let us entrust this time of grace to the Mother of God, proclaimed “blessed because she believed.”** (Lk 1:45).

**“Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 11 October in the year 2011, the seventh of my Pontificate.
Benedictus PP. XVI”**

Permanent link: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu_proprio_20111011_porta-fidei_en.html