

**WEDNESDAY AUDIENCE: YEAR OF FAITH:  
PAPAL CATECHESIS 06  
"Through Faith We Come to True  
Knowledge of God and Ourselves"  
21 November 2012**

Dear brothers and sisters,

We go forward in this Year of Faith, bearing in our hearts the hope of rediscovering how much joy there is in believing and of finding the enthusiasm to communicate to all the truths of the faith. These truths are not a simple message about God, a piece of information about Him. Instead, they express the event of God's encounter with men, a salvific and liberating event, which fulfils the most profound aspirations of man, his desires for peace, brotherhood and love. Faith leads to discover that the encounter with God enhances, refines and elevates what is true, good and beautiful in man. It thus happens that, while God reveals himself and lets himself be known, man comes to know who God is and, in knowing him, discovers himself, his origin, his destiny, the greatness and dignity of human life.

Faith allows an authentic knowledge of God involving the whole human person: it is a "knowing", a knowledge that gives flavour to life, a new taste to existence, a joyful way of being to the world. Faith is expressed in the gift of self to others, in the fraternity that creates solidarity, capable of loving, defeating the loneliness that makes us sad. This knowledge of God through faith is therefore not only intellectual, but vital. It is the knowledge of God-Love, thanks to his own love. The love of God thus makes one see, it opens the eyes, allowing one to know all of reality, beyond the narrow perspectives of individualism and subjectivism that disorient consciences. The knowledge of God is, therefore, an experience of faith and implies, at the same time, an intellectual and moral way: deeply touched by the presence of the Spirit of Jesus in us, we overcome the horizons of our selfishness and open ourselves to the true values of life.

Today I want to focus on the reasonableness of faith in God. The Catholic tradition has from the beginning rejected fideism, which is the will to believe against reason. *Credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd) is not a formula that interprets the Catholic faith. God, in fact, is not absurd; if anything, He is mystery. Mystery, in turn, is not irrational, but the overabundance of sense, of meaning, of truth. If, when looking at the Mystery, one's reason sees darkness, it is not because there is no light in the mystery, but rather because there is too much of it. Just as when a man turns his eyes to look directly at the sun, he sees only darkness; but who would say that the sun is not bright? On the contrary, it is the source of light. Faith allows us to look upon the "sun" that is God, because it is a welcoming of his revelation in history and, so to speak, truly receives all the brightness of the mystery of God, recognizing the great miracle: God has approached man and has offered himself to be known by man, deigning to stoop the creaturely limits of his reason (cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 13). At the same time, God, with his grace, enlightens reason, opens new horizons for it, immeasurable and infinite. For this reason, faith is a strong incentive to seek always, to never stop and never grow quiet in the inexhaustible discovery

of the truth and of reality. The prejudice of some modern thinkers is false, according to which human reason would be as if blocked by the dogmas of faith. The exact opposite is true, as the great masters of the Catholic tradition have shown. St. Augustine, before his conversion, sought the truth restlessly in all the available philosophies, finding them all unsatisfactory. His painstaking rational search was for him a significant pedagogy for the encounter with the Truth of Christ. When he says, "believe, in order to understand, and understand, the better to believe" (*Sermons*, 43, 9: PL 38, 258), it is as if he were recounting his own life experience. Intellect and faith are not strangers or antagonists before divine Revelation; rather, both are conditions for understanding its meaning, to receive its authentic message, approaching the threshold of the mystery. St. Augustine, along with many other Christian authors, witnesses to a faith exercised through the use of reason; he thinks and invites us to think. Following in his wake, St. Anselm will say in his *Proslogion* that the Catholic faith is *fides quaerens intellectum*, where the search for understanding is an act within belief itself. It will be especially St. Thomas Aquinas - thanks to this tradition - who will confront the reason of the philosophers, showing how much new fruitful vitality comes to rational human thought from the 'ingrafting' of the principles and truths of the Christian faith.

The Catholic faith is therefore reasonable and also nourishes confidence in human reason. The First Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, affirmed that reason is able to know God's existence with certainty through the way of creation, while there belongs to faith alone the possibility of knowing "easily, with absolute certainty and without error" (DS 3005) the truths concerning God, in the light of grace. The knowledge of the faith, furthermore, is not opposed to right reason. Blessed Pope John Paul II, in fact, in the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, summed it up thus: "human reason is neither annulled nor debased in assenting to the contents of faith, which are in any case attained by way of free and informed choice" (no. 43). In the irresistible desire for truth, only a harmonious relationship between faith and reason is the right path that leads to God and the fulfilment of self.

This doctrine can be easily recognized throughout the New Testament. St. Paul, writing to the Christians of Corinth, says: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:22-23). In fact, God saved the world not with an act of power, but through the humiliation of his only Son: according to human standards, the unusual manner used by God clashes with the demands of Greek wisdom. Yet, the cross of Christ has its logic, which St. Paul calls: *ho logos tou staurou*, "the word of the cross" (1 Cor 1:18). The term '*logos*' means both reason and word and, if it alludes to the word, it is because it expresses verbally what reason elaborates. Thus, Paul sees in the cross not an irrational event, but a salvific fact that has its own reasonableness, which can be recognized in the light of faith. At the same time, he has such confidence in human reason that he wonders at the fact that many, while seeing the beauty of the works wrought by God, are determined not to believe in Him: "In fact", he writes in his Letter to the Romans, "since the creation of the world, God's invisible perfections - his eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from the things he has made" (1:20). In this way, St. Peter, too, exhorts Christians in the Diaspora to worship "the Lord Christ in your hearts, always ready to respond to anyone who asks you for an account of the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). In a climate of persecution and of

a strong need to witness to the faith, believers are asked to justify their adherence to the word of the Gospel with well-grounded reasons; to give the reasons for our hope.

On these premises regarding the fruitful link between understanding and believing, rests the virtuous relationship between science and faith. Scientific research always leads to the knowledge of new truths about man and the cosmos. We see this. The true good of humanity, accessible in faith, opens the horizon in which its journey of discovery must move. Those studies, for instance, should therefore be encouraged, which are placed at the service of life and which aim to eradicate disease. Also important are the investigations to discover the secrets of our planet and the universe, in the knowledge that man is at the summit of creation not to exploit it foolishly, but to guard it and make it inhabitable. So faith, truly lived, is not in conflict with science; rather, it cooperates with it, offering basic criteria that promote the good of all, asking science to give up only those attempts which - in opposition to God's original plan - can produce effects that turn against man himself. For this reason, too, it is reasonable to believe: if science is a valuable ally of the faith for understanding God's plan in the universe, faith permits scientific progress to occur always for the good and the truth of man, while staying true to this same plan.

That is why it is crucial for people to open themselves to faith and to know God and his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel, a new humanism is inaugurated, an authentic "grammar" of man and of all reality. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms: "God's truth is his wisdom, which commands the whole created order and governs the world. God, who alone "made heaven and earth" (Ps 115:15), can alone impart true knowledge of every created thing in a relation to himself"(no. 216).

We are confident then that our commitment to the evangelization will help give new centrality to the Gospel in the lives of many men and women of our time. Let us pray that all find in Christ the meaning of life and the foundation of true freedom: without God, in fact, man loses himself. The testimonies of those who have gone before us and have dedicated their lives to the Gospel confirm it forever. It is reasonable to believe, our existence is at stake. It is worth spending oneself for Christ, He alone satisfies the desires of truth and of goodness rooted in the soul of every man: now, in the time that passes, and in the endless day of blessed Eternity. Thank you.

***In English Pope Benedict XVI said...***

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In our continuing catechesis for the Year of Faith, we now consider the reasonableness of faith as an encounter with the splendour of God's truth. Through faith we come to true knowledge of God and ourselves, and learn to live wisely in this world as we await the fullness of life and happiness in the next.

Faith and reason are meant to work together in opening the human mind to God's truth. By its nature, faith seeks understanding, while the mind's search for truth finds inspiration, guidance and fulfilment in the encounter with God's revealed word. Far from being in conflict, faith and science go

hand in hand in the service of man's moral advancement and his wise stewardship of creation. The Gospel message of our salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offers us a true humanism, a "grammar" by which we come to understand the mystery of man and the universe. In this Year of Faith, may we open our minds more fully to the light of God's truth, which reveals the grandeur of our human dignity and vocation.