

**WEDNESDAY AUDIENCE: YEAR OF FAITH:
PAPAL CATECHESIS 01
"With Faith, Everything Changes in Us and for Us"
18 OCTOBER 2012**

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today I would like to introduce a new series of catecheses that will be developed throughout the course of the newly inaugurated *Year of Faith* and that, for the time being, will interrupt the series dedicated to the school of prayer. I called this special Year with the Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, so that the Church might experience a renewed enthusiasm in her faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, reawaken her joy in walking on the way he has pointed out to us, and witness in a tangible way to the transforming power of faith.

The 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council is an important occasion to return to God, to deepen and to live one's faith more courageously, to strengthen one's sense of belonging to the Church, the "teacher of humanity", who through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the Sacraments and deeds of charity leads us to encounter and to know Christ, true God and true man. It is an encounter not with an idea or a plan of life, but with a living Person, who profoundly transforms us from within by revealing to us our true identity as children of God.

Encountering Christ renews our human relationships by directing them, day by day, to a greater solidarity and fraternity, in accord with the logic of love. Faith in the Lord is not something that affects only our minds, the realm of intellectual knowledge; rather, it is a change involving the whole of our existence: our feelings, heart, mind, will, body, emotions and human relationships. With faith, everything changes in us and for us, and it reveals clearly our future destiny, the truth of our vocation in history, the meaning of our lives, the joy of being pilgrims en route to our heavenly homeland.

But - we ask ourselves - is faith really the transforming power of our lives, of my life? Or is it just one part of life, without being the deciding factor that involves it completely? Through these catecheses for the *Year of Faith*, we will journey along a path to strengthen or to rediscover the joy of faith, by learning that faith is not something foreign and disconnected from real life but rather, it is its very soul. Faith in a God who is love, and who drew near to man by becoming incarnate and giving himself on the Cross to save us and reopen the doors of Heaven, tells us clearly that man's fullness consists in love alone.

Today, as ongoing cultural transformations often reveal forms of savagery passing under the sign of "conquests of civilization", it needs to be repeated clearly: faith affirms that there is no true humanity except in the places, in the acts, in the times and in the ways in which man is animated by the love that comes from God, is expressed as a gift and is manifested in relationships rich in love, compassion, care and disinterested service for the other. Where there is domination, possessiveness, exploitation and commodification of the other brought about by egoism; where the arrogance of the 'I' closed in upon itself exists, there man is impoverished, degraded and disfigured.

Christian faith, which is active in love and strong in hope, does not limit life but rather humanizes it and indeed, makes it fully human.

Faith means welcoming this transforming message into our lives; it means receiving the revelation of God, who lets us know who He is, how he acts and what his plans are for us. To be sure, the mystery of God forever remains beyond the capacity of our concepts and our reason, our rites and our prayers. And yet, by his revelation God himself communicates with us, he tells us about himself and he 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 in us – through the working of the Holy Spirit – the proper conditions for us to recognize his Word. God himself, in his will to reveal himself to us, to enter into contact with us and to make himself present in history, enables us to listen to him and to receive him. St. Paul expresses it with joy and gratitude in this way: “We 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 *Thessalonians* 2:13).

God has revealed himself in words and deeds throughout the course of a long history of friendship with man, culminating in the Incarnation of the Son of God and in his mystery of death and resurrection. God not only revealed himself in the history of a people; he not only spoke by means of the prophets, but he crossed the threshold of Heaven to enter the land of men as a man, so that we might encounter him and listen to him. And from Jerusalem, the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation spread to the ends of the earth. The Church, born from the side of Christ, became the bearer of a new and firm hope: Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, the Saviour of the world, who is seated at the right hand of the Father and who is judge of the living and the dead. This is the *kerigma*, the central and unsettling proclamation of the faith.

Yet from the beginning there arose the problem of the “rule of faith”, i.e. of the faithfulness of believers to the truth of the Gospel, in which they were to stand firm, and to the saving truth about God and man, which was to be guarded and handed on. St. Paul writes: “Through it [the Gospel] you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you. Otherwise you will have believed in vain” (1 *Corinthians* 15:2).

But where do we find the essential formula of the faith? Where do we find the truths that have been faithfully transmitted and that are light for our daily lives? The answer is simple: in the Creed, in the Profession of Faith, or the Symbol of Faith, we reconnect with the original event of the Person and history of Jesus of Nazareth. It makes concrete what the Apostle to the Gentiles said to the Christians at Corinth: “For 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 (1 *Corinthians* 15:3).

Today, too, we need the Creed to be better known, understood and prayed. Above all, it is important that the Creed be “recognized”, as it were. For knowing can be a merely intellectual act, while “recognizing” involves discovering the profound connection between the truths that we profess in the Creed and our daily lives, such that that these truths truly and tangibly become – as

they have always been – light for the steps of our lives, water that quenches our burning thirst along our journey, and life that overcomes some of the deserts of our modern day. The moral life of the believer is grafted onto the Creed, and it finds its foundation and justification therein.

It is no accident that Blessed John Paul II wanted the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* - a secure norm for teaching the faith and a reliable source for a renewed catechesis - to be patterned after the Creed. It was a matter of confirming and protecting the central core of the truths of the faith, while putting it into language more intelligible for men of our own times, for us. It is the Church's duty to transmit the faith and to communicate the Gospel, so that Christian truths may shed light on new cultural transformations, and so that Christians may be able to make a defence for the hope that is in them (cf. *1 Peter* 3:14).

Today we live in a society that has changed profoundly, even compared with the recent past, and that is in constant motion. The process of secularization and a widespread nihilistic mentality, according to which everything is relative, have had a profound impact on the general mindset. Thus, life is often lived lightly without clear ideals and solid hopes, and within fluid and passing family and social ties. Above all, the new generations are not being formed to seek the truth and the profound meaning of life that goes beyond all that is passing. Nor are they being formed to have stable affections and attachments, and to trust. On the contrary, relativism leads to having no firm foundation. Suspicion and inconstancy cause ruptures in human relationships, while life is lived in experiments that do not last, without assuming responsibility. If individualism and relativism seem to dominate the minds of many of our contemporaries, it cannot be said that believers remain totally immune to these dangers by which we are confronted in handing on the faith. The survey promoted on all the continents for the celebration of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, highlighted some of these dangers: a faith lived in a passive or private manner, failure to educate in the faith, the fracture between life and faith.

Today, Christians often do not even know the core of their own Catholic faith, the Creed. This can leave the door open to certain syncretism and religious relativism that lacks clarity about the truths we must believe and about Christianity's unique power to save. Today we are not so far away from the risk of building a "do-it-yourself" religion. We must instead return to God, to the God of Jesus Christ. We must rediscover the message of the Gospel and make it enter more deeply into our consciences and into our daily lives.

In the catecheses for the *Year of Faith*, I would like to offer help for the journey, for taking up and exploring the central truths of the faith about God, about man, about the Church, about the whole social and cosmic reality, by meditating and reflecting on the statements of the Creed. And I would like for it to become clear that the content or truths of faith (*fides quae* - "faith which") are directly connected to our lives, that they require a conversion of our lives, that they give birth to a new way of believing in God (*fides qua* - "faith by which"). Knowing God, meeting him, exploring the features of His Face, brings our lives into play, for He enters into the deep dynamics of being human.

May the journey we will make this year cause us all to grow in faith and love for Christ, so that we may learn to live, in our choices and daily actions, the good and beautiful life of the Gospel. Thank you.

Pope Benedict XVI continued in English:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Audience introduces a new series of catecheses meant to accompany the Church's celebration of the Year of Faith, which marks the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. The Year of Faith invites us to renewed enthusiasm for the gift of our belief in Jesus Christ. Jesus, the Son of God, shows us the ultimate meaning of our human existence. Faith transforms our lives, enabling us to know and love the God who created us, to live freely in accordance with his will, and to cooperate in building a truly humane and fraternal society. Our catecheses will thus deal with the central truths of the faith as expressed in the words of the Apostles' Creed. May the Year of Faith lead all believers to a fuller knowledge of the mystery of Christ and a deeper participation in the life of his Body, the Church!

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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.