

BENEDICT XVI: APOSTOLIC LETTER *PORTA FIDEI*

FOR THE INDICTION OF THE YEAR OF FAITH

1. The “door of faith” (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It is to believe in one God who is Love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8): the Father, who in the fullness of time sent his Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord’s glorious return.

2. Ever since the start of my ministry as Successor of Peter, I have 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. The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life in abundance. It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. This presupposition can no longer be taken for granted. Whereas in the past a uniting cultural matrix was recognizable, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer is the case in large swathes of society, because a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.

3. We cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden (cf. *Mt* 5:13-16). The people of today still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cf. *Jn* 4:14). We must rediscover a taste to feed on the word of God, and on the bread of life. Belief in Jesus Christ is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.

4. In the light of all this, I have decided to announce a Year of Faith. It will begin on 11 October 2012, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and it will end on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, on 24 November 2013. The starting date of 11 October 2012 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Moreover, the theme of the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that I have convoked for October 2012 is “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith”. This will be a good opportunity to usher the whole Church into a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith.

5. I believe that timing the launch of the Year of Faith to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council will provide a good opportunity to help people understand that the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, “*have lost nothing of their value or brilliance*. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the Magisterium, within the Church’s Tradition. I feel in duty bound to point to the Council as *the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century*: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.”

6. The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us. The Year of Faith, from this perspective, is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world.

7. “*Caritas Christi urget nos*” (2 Cor 5:14): it is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize. Today as in the past, he sends us through the highways of the world to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19). There is a need for stronger ecclesial commitment to new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith. In rediscovering his love day by day, the missionary commitment of believers attains force and vigour that can never fade away. Faith expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples. Saint Augustine tells us that many people are in search of God to find the right path towards the “door of faith”.

8. I invite my brother bishops from all over the world to join the Successor of Peter, during this time of spiritual grace, in recalling the precious gift of faith. We want to celebrate this Year in a worthy and fruitful manner. Reflection on the faith will have to be intensified, so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel. We will have the opportunity to profess our faith in the Risen Lord 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. Religious communities as well as parish communities, and all ecclesial bodies old and new, are to find a way, during this Year, to make a public profession of the *Credo*.

9. We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to *profess* the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction. It will also be a good opportunity to intensify the *celebration* of the faith in the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist. At the same time, we make it our prayer that believers’ *witness* of life may grow in credibility. To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make their own, especially in the course of this Year.

Early Christians were required to learn the creed from memory. It served them as a daily prayer not to forget the commitment they had undertaken in baptism. Saint Augustine speaks of this; “You have received it and recited it, but in your minds and hearts you must keep it ever present, you must repeat it in your beds, recall it in the public squares and not forget it during meals: even when your body is asleep, you must watch over it with your hearts.”

10. There exists a profound unity between the act by which we believe and the content to which we give our assent. The first act by which one comes to faith is God’s gift and the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within. The example of Lydia is particularly eloquent. While he was at Philippi, Paul went on the Sabbath to proclaim the Gospel to some women; among them was Lydia and “the Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). There is an important meaning contained within this expression. Saint Luke teaches that knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless the heart, the authentic sacred space within the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and to understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God.

Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. This “standing with him” points towards an understanding of the reasons for believing. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes.

Profession of faith is an act both personal and communitarian. As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “‘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. ‘I believe’ is also the Church, our mother, responding to God by faith as she teaches us to say both ‘I believe’ and ‘we believe’.”

On the other hand, we must not forget that in our cultural context, very many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world. This search is an authentic “preamble” to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God.

11. The Year of Faith will require a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in her two thousand years of history.

12. I have invited the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, by agreement with the competent Dicasteries of the Holy See, to draw up a *Note*, providing the Church and individual believers with some guidelines on how to live this Year of Faith in the most effective and appropriate ways, at the service of belief and evangelization.

13. One thing that will be of decisive importance in this Year is retracing the history of our faith, marked by the unfathomable mystery of the interweaving of holiness and sin. During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (*Heb* 12:2). By faith, Mary accepted the Angel’s word and believed the message that she was to become the Mother of God (cf. *Lk* 1:38). By faith, the Apostles left everything to follow their Master (cf. *Mk* 10:28). By faith, the disciples formed the first community, gathered around the teaching of the Apostles, in prayer, in celebration of the Eucharist, holding their possessions in common so as to meet the needs of the brethren (cf. *Acts* 2:42-47). By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel. By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity. By faith, countless Christians have promoted action for justice so as to put into practice the word of the Lord, who came to proclaim deliverance from oppression and a year of favour for all (cf. *Lk* 4:18-19). By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names are written in the Book of Life (cf. *Rev* 7:9, 13:8), have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus in the family, in the workplace, in public life, in the exercise of the charisms and ministries to which they were called. By faith, we too live: by the living recognition of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in our history.

14. The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity. Many Christians dedicate their lives with love to those who are lonely, marginalized or excluded, because it is in them they see the reflection of Christ’s own face. Faith that enables us to recognize Christ and it is his love that impels us to assist him whenever he becomes our neighbour along the journey of life.

15. Saint Paul asks his disciple Timothy to “aim at faith” (*2 Tim* 2:22) with the same constancy as when he was a boy (cf. *2 Tim* 3:15). This invitation is directed to each of us, that none of us grow lazy in the faith. It is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people 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.

“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.

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.