



6th October, 2012

110/2012

PASTORAL LETTER ON THE OCCASION OF THE YEAR OF THE FAITH

Pope Benedict XVI has launched the Year of the Faith by issuing a document entitled “The Door to Faith”. During this particular year, he is encouraging all Christians to grow in faith. The Year of the Faith will commence on 11th October 2012 and end on 24th November 2013, Feast of Christ the King. As the Pope himself stated in his introduction: “The door of faith is always open of us, leading us to be united with God and to be part of the Church.”

The Faith and Us

One of the common denominators which unites the Maltese people is the fact that nearly all of us declare that “we are Christians”. The Christian is a person who believes, who has faith in the God of Jesus Christ.

But the word ‘faith’ does not hold the same meaning for everyone. There are those who consider themselves to be believers because they were baptized when they were infants and hold a baptismal certificate. There are others who say they believe because, as children, they attended catechism classes until such time that they received the Sacrament of Confirmation. Then there are those who, as adolescents and young adults, following their Confirmation, set out to live their faith concretely. Yet there are so many of us who still do not heed the Word of Jesus Christ! To begin with, we need to establish which of the above categories applies to us and our family. We need to discern our level of faith.

Faith

The word ‘faith’ has several meanings. It is most commonly used in the sense that one can be said to place one’s trust in another person. For example, a person entrusts a sum of money to another person because he trusts him, has faith in him.

Although this is a worthy sentiment, the Year of the Faith alludes to a different kind of faith. It refers to that act of belief and trust which exists between the believer and God. In order for this to be possible, God bestowed two great gifts upon mankind. These gifts were given only to man, who is different from animals in that animals are only able to recognize material things through their sensory powers. On his part, man

has the capacity to go beyond this sensory awareness. He is capable of believing in other things.

The second gift which God bestowed upon mankind lies in the fact that God wished to communicate himself to man. This is referred to as 'revelation'. Gradually, God removed the veil which concealed him in order that we could come to know him better.

Choices

For this year, Pope Benedict is calling upon us to increase our awareness of these two gifts: we are being asked to look beyond the material world that exists around us, so that our minds can dwell upon those things which belong to the domain of God. God wishes us to pay more attention to those things which he revealed to us, mostly through Jesus, and to allow our lives to be guided by them.

There exists a problem in that today's contemporary world presents us with a greater number of things which alienate our senses, particularly those of hearing and sight. Today, unlike years ago, it is not a matter of filling the void that exists around us,; rather we need to turn our attention away from all that which distracts us from finding a place in our mind that enables us to receive and think about realities that are beyond us, hidden in God. Our problem is finding the space and time to open up to God.

Our starting point should be an initial Act of Faith: "God exists". The Creator exists and we need to make contact with him. Without this initial act of faith, we will not possess a will strong enough to create a space for God. We will remain at the material level, and our senses are powerful enough to capture all our attention without leaving the necessary space around us. First we need to make a conscious decision to make time for God the Creator.

The Second Choice

The second choice is : "I wish to know the hidden God". One must have a desire to come to know him. This cannot happen through purely human effort. If the knowledge about God is spiritual, it must be a spiritual gift – one that comes from God – and requires spiritual listening, a space where there is spiritual emptiness. Why is it that when we are infirm or close to death, we are more concerned with spiritual matters? Could it be that at such times, material things are of no consequence and therefore more priority is given to the spiritual element? We begin to pose questions such as "I wonder who will be waiting for me? I wonder how God will appear to me?" Under these circumstances, owing to our fear and preoccupations, we are ready to be enlightened by God.

The person of Faith

The person of Faith is that person who does not wait until he is infirm or on the brink of death in order to create for himself a space to think of God; rather he seeks out such a space in order to come to know God in his daily life.

God has brought together all that which he wishes to communicate to us through one person, who is the message: he has done so through Our Lord Jesus Christ. God entered human history through the person of Abraham, and continued to lead his people, walk with them and teach them. Until finally, in the fullness of time, his teaching was incorporated in the person of Jesus.

The Core of Faith

God has bestowed upon Christians great gifts in order that we may travel along the path of faith in Jesus:

- He was well aware that no person on earth is capable of leading other people. For this reason he sent his only Son-made-man to reveal God the Father to us and to instruct us how we should behave as children of God. Therefore, we need the Gospels in order to discover what Jesus did and said: otherwise, how can we follow him?
- Jesus knew how hard it is for us to walk alone along this path; for this reason he established a Church of believers; a community which can walk along the path together.
- Jesus also gave us the Eucharist. During the mass, after we have listened to his Word, we strengthen our faith through the Jesus in the Eucharist. The graces which are received through the celebration of the mass cannot be received from other sources.

Conclusion

In a few words, Pope Benedict is appealing to us to make better and more frequent use of the two gifts which we have already outlined earlier on in this Pastoral Letter: to make more time for God, so that he may fill us with his graces; and to reflect more profoundly upon the words of Jesus on the content of our faith. If we wish to increase our faith, our biggest contribution should be for us to “find time to be silent and pray. On the other hand, we should try and understand what Jesus is trying to tell us through his Word”. We need to know him, in order to be able to speak about him; we need to know his teachings because we must walk in his footsteps; we need to follow him because he is the Way; we need to discover his love.

All that is required is that we offer God our time and our attention: he will give us the rest. This is Faith. This is God's generosity. If we live our faith, which emanates from God, then it cannot be conquered.

We impart upon you our Apostolic Blessing.

✠ **PAUL CREMONA O.P.**

Archbishop of Malta

✠ **MARIO GRECH**

Bishop of Gozo