



THE YEAR OF FAITH

A Pastoral Letter by Bishop Richard Lennon

26 September 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is my pleasure to share this Letter with the Faithful of the Diocese of Cleveland and all people of good will throughout the eight counties of our diocese. The occasion prompting this letter is the Apostolic Letter given *Motu Proprio* by Pope Benedict XVI entitled, *PORTA FIDEI*. This Apostolic Letter announces a “Year of Faith.” The Holy Father issued his Letter on 11 October 2011 indicating that the Year of Faith would begin on Thursday, 11 October 2012 and end on Sunday, 24 November 2013.

The date for the opening of the Year of Faith is significant as it will be the fiftieth anniversary of the Opening of the Second Vatican Council. As we know, this event in the life of our Church has been and continues to be energizing and directs much of our Catholic life, especially through the teachings of the sixteen documents issued by the Council. Moreover, the year 2012 also commemorates another significant event in the life of the Church, the twentieth anniversary of the issuance of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on 11 October 1992 by Blessed John Paul II.

Official writings of the Pope are entitled and known in Latin by the opening words of the document. This document is no exception. It is named *PORTA FIDEI*, which is Latin for “Door of Faith.” The Pope wrote, “The ‘door of faith’ is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into His Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the Word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime.”

The image of the door is taken from Acts 14:27. Paul and Barnabas, after their first missionary journey, came back to Antioch. "On their arrival, they assembled the church and gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the pagans."

It turns out that the image of a door was used several times by St. Paul in his letters. In the First Letter to the Corinthians we find that he wrote, "I shall be staying at Ephesus until Pentecost because a big and important door has opened for my work and there is a great deal of opposition." (1 Cor: 16:9) In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul writes, "When I went up to Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the door was wide open for my work there. . . ." (2 Cor 2:12) Again in Colossians, the Apostle asks the faithful, "At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the Word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ for which I am in prison." (Col 4:3)

All of these examples are about evangelization. In Acts, the missionaries are talking about how God had allowed the pagans to understand the message of the Gospel. In First Corinthians a great possibility is envisioned, a "big and important door" although there is a "great deal of opposition." In the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle feels that he had to miss an opportunity because of urgent cares—the door "was" wide open. Finally, in Colossians, Paul, in prison, mentions that he hopes a door will open for him to spread the Word—he is asking for an opportunity to evangelize.

We can certainly relate to all the situations above in terms of our own evangelization. We are thankful for the evangelization that has given us the Diocese of Cleveland. The door was opened and this great diocese with its parishes and institutions was formed. We can also relate to the instance of a great opportunity, even though met with some resistance. This Year of Faith is also an opportunity, and, just like St. Paul in Ephesus, we are no strangers to "a great deal of opposition"—it is the stuff of headlines in the daily paper and of what we see and hear in the media.

We are also aware that we can miss opportunities. St. Paul in the Second Letter to the Corinthians said the door *was* open. The Year of Faith is a moment of grace and represents an opening, an opportunity. I pray that we respond to God's grace and we make the most of it. Benedict states, "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."

Why the Year of Faith? In response to this question, Benedict makes four observations. First, the Holy Father sees that we can no longer "think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied." Most of us would have to agree with Pope Benedict that there is at this time "a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people." We all know loved ones who are away from the Church for a variety of reasons, and we long for their return.

The tide of the Sea of Faith, to use an image from the English poet Matthew Arnold, "seems to be waning." But the Holy Father is pointing out to us various resources for renewal. First is the message of the Second Vatican Council, authentically interpreted. These documents, we were told by Blessed John Paul II, "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 more than ever 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." (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57).

In the years since the Second Vatican Council, the world has lived through any number of revolutions: political, social, economic and spiritual. In the chaos that accompanied these often dizzying changes, some people have lost their bearings. The Holy Father invites us to revisit the Council documents, to read them with seriousness and faith. As in the Gospel, Jesus calls the disciples to once again cast their nets; we, too, are called to cast our nets into the depths of the meaning of these documents.

Second, as a precedent for his initiative, Pope Benedict evokes the Year of Faith announced by Pope Paul VI in 1967 to commemorate the 1900th anniversary of the martyrdoms of Saints Peter and Paul. He desired the Year of Faith to be an opportunity for the whole Church “to make an authentic and sincere profession of the same faith” that motivated Peter and Paul to live the faith even unto death. The Year of Faith concluded with the publication of the Credo of the People of God showing the essential context that for centuries has formed the heritage of all believers. Benedict said that Paul VI hoped by this celebration the Church could *re-appropriate* “exact knowledge of the faith, so as to reinvigorate it, purify it, confirm it and confess it.” I emphasize the word “re-appropriate” because I think this Year of Faith can inspire us to do the same. We have to get back to the basics of our Catholic faith. All sorts of studies have shown Catholics have a hard time articulating what they believe, even about doctrines of monumental importance, like the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist defined as Transubstantiation.

Re-appropriating the content of the faith is being able to express the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Son of Mary, the Word Made Flesh, whose death brought life to the world. The doctrines of the Church are the expression of our understanding of who Jesus is for us. The articulation of faith deepens our relationship with Jesus and our relationship with Jesus is what drives us to the articulation of our faith. Our knowledge of Jesus Christ and through him, of the Triune God, leads to love of God which, in turn, leads to service of God and neighbor. We study our faith to deepen our knowledge of God, so that we can love Him more and serve Him better.

Benedict points to the Catechism of the Catholic Church as an “authentic fruit of the Second Vatican Council.” In its pages we find the truths taught by the Catholic Church and are invited to accept the challenge through study and prayer to grow in a fuller understanding of those truths as they apply to the reality of our times. Only with humility will we be able to gain deeper insight into the mystery of an all-loving God and the mystery of our salvation. The more we know, the more we should love. I am not talking primarily about an academic knowledge, but of a wisdom that allows us to see God in our lives. The gift of knowledge, one of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, is about articulating our relationship of communion with God, as Pope Benedict tells us, of “friendship with the Son of God who gives us life and life in abundance.”

Third, The Holy Father has clearly told us that to renew our faith means to renew and deepen our relationship with Jesus. We must “rediscover” how to feed ourselves on the Word of God and the Bread of Life. Pope Benedict challenges all the Faithful to enter into this Year of Faith by truly living and deepening our relationship with Jesus Christ. To that end, the banners for the Year of Faith in the Diocese of Cleveland will proclaim the message: “Living our Relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Fourth, the Year of Faith is a great opportunity to retrace the history of our faith both as a diocese and in recalling our personal pilgrimage. I hope that one of the fruits of this year will be a greater appreciation of the saints of the Church and all those who witnessed in love to their faith. As Catholics we have a tremendous treasure in the lives of these witnesses and in our traditional devotions. Let us rejoice in the holy patrons of our parishes and study our history in order to renew our fervor.

I wish to highlight a few particular points to demonstrate the gift that Pope Benedict is inviting us to embrace during our Diocesan celebration of the Year of Faith.

First, following the example of Pope Paul VI, Benedict has highlighted the role that the Creed needs to have in the present Year of Faith. Thus, I recommend that the Creed be said by individuals and together by every family daily during the Year of Faith. For that purpose, prayer cards containing the Apostles Creed have been printed for all Faithful. In his apostolic letter, Pope Benedict quotes St. Augustine, who said of the Creed: "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."

Second, I am asking all parishes to celebrate the opening of the Year of Faith at each of the scheduled weekend masses on Saturday 13 October and Sunday 14 October, thereby having full participation of the Faithful at the special mass that is to be used that day. During the course of the year, the people of the Diocese will be invited to join in a variety of celebrations and activities marking the Year of Faith as a sign of our unity as a diocese. This plan flows from the

teaching of the Second Vatican Council which states that the Liturgy is the summit of what we do as believers and the source which strengthens us to live our faith.

Third, plans are well underway to underscore the place of the Sacrament of Penance in our Catholic lives by giving great witness to this gift that Jesus has left his Church. There is nothing that can help us know and experience the greatness of God's mercy like the Sacrament of Penance. "Repent and believe," Jesus said at the beginning of His ministry. The rediscovery of reconciliation can do so much for the renewal of faith in the lives of the Faithful.

Fourth, Benedict has asked for a focus on the teachings contained in the sixteen documents coming from the Second Vatican Council and on the teachings contained in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This focus can be achieved in many ways: homilies that include teachings from the two sources mentioned above; short series of talks on different aspects of our faith offered by qualified priests, deacons, and laity; presentations where a guest presenter is invited to address a parish or groups of parishes; and inserts for parish bulletins. Each parish community is a "school of faith"; I trust that my brother priests will be able to offer many opportunities for the reflection our Holy Father has called for during this year on these important teachings.

Our own individual efforts must be joined to the collective ones for the formation of faith. That means personal commitment to a continued education in the faith. The content of the faith must be studied, meditated upon, and lived. I hope that at the end of the Year of Faith every Catholic household will have the Catechism next to the Bible and that both will be used frequently for nourishing and deepening the spiritual life of each member of the family.

Fifth, as we renew our faith we will be able to share it with others in a more profound way. Each of us is sent to witness to the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the Holy Father's letter, *PORTA FIDEI*, it states well, "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 minds and hearts of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end." As members of the Church we are obliged to witness to our faith. Each one of us is sent into the

world to joyfully witness to God's love and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Please remember in your prayers the intention of the success of the Bishops' Synod on the New Evangelization that will be held in Rome to coincide with the beginning of the Year of Faith.

In Cleveland, we have been challenged both by demographic shifts from the city to the suburbs and a declining participation by Catholics in their parishes. The merger, closing and reopening of our parishes has been a difficult task for many of our brothers and sisters and we have all been tested by it. Nonetheless, the Year of Faith calls us to come together as a local Church, to realize our need for God, and our need for one another, and then to continue our pilgrimage, united in prayer for one another, and witnessing to the love and presence of God.

“We are the salt of the earth. We are a light set on high to give light to all.” (Mt. 5. 13-16)
My prayer for each person who reads this letter or hears its message is that we live this Year of Faith together in a way that will enrich us personally and will build up our faith community. What an opportunity this represents for all of us! Please pray that our whole diocese will be renewed.

May St. John the Evangelist, the patron saint of our cathedral and a model of loving discipleship of the Lord, inspire us during this year. May Mary, our Blessed Mother, who is called the Star of the New Evangelization, inspire us to a deeper faith in her Divine Son, resulting in a joyful relationship with Him as we pray with her, “My Soul Magnifies the Lord.”

Your Brother and Bishop in Faith,

+ Richard Lennon



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DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND