

Deepening our Faith

As we continue our Lenten Journey, and go through the third week, let us reflect on one of the three most important orientations of the Year of Faith. Of course we know the three historic contexts of this Year of Faith: the Synod on New Evangelization, the Golden Jubilee of II Vatican Council, and the 20th year of promulgating the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Other than these historic realities, the Holy Father gives us clear direction on the observance of this Year of Faith. He speaks of three vital aspects of our faith life: deepening our faith, celebrating or living the faith that we profess, and proclaiming that faith.

This week we are dwelling on the first aspect – deepening our faith, in the light of the Holy Father’s apostolic letter ‘Porta Fidei’ – The Door of Faith. In order to deepen our faith, first of all we should know what ‘faith’ itself is or what does it mean to believe, and also what is it that we believe in or the precepts of faith. This week we deal with only the first reality: what is faith? We all know the classic definition in the letter to the Hebrews: ‘certitude that the unseen exists and the conviction that what is hoped for will be ours’.

But over and above that, faith is deeply personal and it is an organic reality. If so, faith is never static. It is ever growing. As Pope Benedict XVI puts it in ‘Porta Fidei’ (paragraph five), ‘faith is ever renewing and needs to be constantly renewed’. This shows the relevance of deepening our faith. In fact we can never stay at the same point or level in faith. Either we keep going, deepening or failing/weakening.

Lent, in itself, is a blessed time of grace offered to us every year and more so in this Year of Faith to make a detailed examination of our faith: to see where we stand, how far and how deep we have gone since the last Lent. And here is the relevance of the Holy Father’s call for a ‘rediscovery of true and original faith’ (paragraph five of ‘Porta Fidei’). He also speaks of the Journey of Faith in paragraph two. In paragraph three the Holy Father refers to the salt losing its taste and the lamp being hidden, and he says that we cannot accept or afford such situations. So faith is that ever growing and ongoing commitment of oneself to God. It is an existential relationship with the Divine.

Now, how do we deepen our faith? There are very many ways of deepening one’s faith, of which a few we will reflect this week. Primarily it is by believing that one’s faith is deepened. We live in a world of proliferation of faiths, real and fake. To believe and stay in faith is not easy. Too many realities, ideologies, and view-points draw us from every corner. This situation prevails in our personal, family, social and religious life. There we need to have the courage to give importance to the radical and fundamental union with Christ, and not only to the external and socio-cultural effects of Catholic Christian Faith. The Jesus Youth Journey, well made, is the Christian Faith Journey par excellence.

A few practical suggestions to deepen one's faith:

- A. The primary and easiest means to deepen our faith is being faithful to 'the pillars of Jesus Youth Spirituality', especially prayer and sacraments. Make a sincere examination of conscience on how faithfully we could follow the 'constants'. Definitely there might have been failures and 'desert experience'. But it had been there even in the life of Jesus and any serious disciple.
- B. Good and Deeper reading on faith. As we know one of the six point action plans developed by Jesus Youth for the effective celebration of the Year of Faith is 'Journeying with the Saints'. It is a wonderful opportunity to read the lives of saints who continually deepened their faith even in the midst of great trials and tribulations. Let us seriously make use of that opportunity.
- C. Meaningful and serious minded discussion on matters of faith. If we speak of only worldly things all the time, our faith is not going to grow any deeper. Another action plan by Jesus Youth, 'YouCat Study groups' can be excellent platforms for serious discussion and study leading to the deepening of our faith. Have we tried it yet?
- D. Good company with people interested and who take faith seriously. Instead of those people indulging in loose talk and shallow ideologies, one should try to develop companionship with those who are serious and committed to faith. They will encourage and help you deepen your faith.
- E. Reflective observance of Catholic Faith Traditions. Our faith is experienced, lived and handed on through innumerable traditions. Examples are fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage, etc. Sometimes many of the traditions might have gotten distorted or misinterpreted over the course of time. So, we have to search for the original spirit and make a meaningful and experiential observance of them.

The spirit of Lent is simply 'renunciation'. We recall Jesus' renunciation of the world and observance of fast in the desert during Lent. Eventually that leads us to Calvary where we see the perfect model of renunciation on the Cross. This year we are very specially blessed in this season of Lent with yet another magnificent example of an ultimate renunciation in the person of our Most Holy Father Pope Benedict the XVI, who, of his own, steps down and fades into history! Having given us the Year of Faith to deepen our faith, he himself shows us what it means to really 'Deepen the Faith' – a perfectly detached life.

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