

The Year of Faith

Kristopher W. Seaman

In honor of the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI has declared October 11, 2012 the beginning of a Year of Faith. November 24, 2013, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, will end the Year of Faith. In *Porta Fidei*, “The Door of Faith” (Acts 14:27), the apostolic letter marking this occasion, the pope states the door of faith “is always open for us” and ushers “us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church” (1).

A door marks a transition from one room to another. Anthropologist Victor Turner suggested that the threshold of the door is a place of being “betwixed and between.” Standing at the threshold is a place, from a specifically religious perspective, where “the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace,” as the pope states (1).

The pope, in this document, eloquently weaves the building of faith within our lives together with enacting love in our lives. Faith is nourished in the liturgy. The Word of God proclaimed is an encounter with Christ who calls us to faith, to take these words into our minds and hearts. In addition, Eucharist likewise nourishes us. We encounter Christ whom we receive during Communion. Christ enters our bodies to transform us—inside out (see 3). This encounter with Christ is an offer for us “to walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4; cited from the document). “Through faith, this new life shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the the resurrection. To the extent that he (people) freely cooperates, man’s thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed, on a journey that is never completely finished in this life. ‘Faith working through love’ (Galatians 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life . . . ” (6). This encounter with Christ is transformative: it builds faith which in turn “shapes the whole of human existence.” This means that faith is a response to one’s encounter with Christ. Christ is not just known in the mind as an intellectual exercise, but is also embodied in the heart and in every fiber of our being.

Faith, as the pope explains, “expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness” (7). This faith “has its origin in God” (7); God who is Love. Our faith, because it is



a response to God’s transforming love, is expressed in our love toward one another. The pope reminds us that faith “without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt. Faith and charity each require the other” (14). Once again, the pope eloquently discusses this connection.

Indeed, many Christians dedicate their lives with love to those who are lonely, marginalized or excluded, as to those who are the first with a claim on our attention and the most important for us to support, because it is in them that the reflection of Christ’s own face is seen. Through faith, we can recognize the face of the risen Lord in those who ask for our love. “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). These words are a warning that must not be forgotten and a perennial invitation to return the love by which he takes care of us. It is 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. (14)

Here the pope makes an important connection between faith and love. Faith allows us to see Christ in one another and thus respond to one another with love. The value here is that love flows from our faith, a faith which bears fruit.

The pope’s invitation for this Year of Faith is to deepen our faith and witness to that faith in “an authentic and lasting love” (15). We are invited to walk through the door of faith that bears fruit in love. To help us deepen our faith, he urges a careful preparation of liturgies that engage people as well as learning the content of the faith, especially the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (which turns 20 years old in the Year of Faith).

KRISTOPHER W. SEAMAN, DMIN, is a doctoral student at at King’s College, University of London. He is the former director of the Office of Worship of the Gary Diocese.