

THE YEAR OF FAITH: SOURCE OF RENEWAL

On Sunday 16 October 2011 Pope Benedict XVI announced a *Year of Faith* for the whole Church, to run from the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council on 11 October 2012 to the Solemnity of Christ the 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*. It coincides too with a gathering of bishops from across the world in Rome for a Synod themed, 'The New Evangelisation for the Transmission of the Christian Faith'.

Outlining the purpose of the *Year of Faith*, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the need to give fresh impetus to the mission of the whole Church by leading people 'out of the wilderness' in which they so often find themselves 'towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.'¹

Here in Ireland, we have had the perfect prelude to the *Year of Faith* in the International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin. One of the abiding images of the Congress will be the long queues of women and men, young and old, lay, religious and ordained waiting together to attend the numerous seminars, testimonies and talks that made up the daily Congress programme. Most of the talks and seminars were oversubscribed. This was just one of many signs of a thirst among people of every age for a deeper knowledge of friendship with Christ and with one another. It is evidence of a widespread interest in serious engagement with the intellectual content of faith and constructive discussion about how we can support each other in living that faith in the particular circumstances of Ireland today.

The *Year of Faith* therefore provides the Church in Ireland with an ideal framework from which to build on the many graces of the Eucharistic Congress. At its heart is the programme of renewal set out in the texts of the Second Vatican Council. These texts, 'have lost nothing of their value or brilliance...[for] there we find a sure

compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning'.²

The *Year of Faith* invites us to read these documents afresh and rediscover their original energy and vision for the future. We are particularly encouraged to study and reflect on what are sometimes called the 'four true pillars' of the Council. Beginning with the life of Christ offered to us in the celebration of the sacred liturgy (cfr. Constitution, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and in His divine word (cfr. Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*), we are encouraged to reflect on our communion with him and with one another in the Church (cfr. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen gentium*) and on its relationship with the contemporary world (cfr. Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et spes*).

This inevitably turns our attention to 'one of the most important fruits' of the Council, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. A key objective of the *Year of Faith* is to see the *Catechism* more widely distributed and its contents made better known. It is important that we take up this challenge here in Ireland. On page after page, what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church. The period since the Council has been marked by a welcome renewal in study and prayerful reflection on the Word of God. The *Year of Faith* invites us to rediscover the life of Christ as set forth in the *Catechism*. We are encouraged to know the reasons for the faith we have in a culture which sometimes presents the very basis of faith as irrational. We are invited to understand, celebrate, live and pray our faith as expressed in the 'four pillars' around which the *Catechism* is framed: the profession of faith, the liturgy and the sacraments, life in Christ and prayer.

The Church in Ireland already has an invaluable resource for the *Year of Faith* in *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*. Specific resources for Parishes and other groups based on this text have already been produced by the Council for Pastoral Renewal and Adult Faith Development of the Irish



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Bishops' Conference. It is the hoped that during the *Year of Faith* a new Irish Catechism for Adults will be also approved and published to complement these and further resources.

The *Year of Faith* is at once an invitation and a challenge, a challenge which, I hope, everyone in the Church in Ireland will take up, energised and encouraged by the International Eucharistic Congress. It is an opportunity to celebrate and renew our faith – individually, in families, in parishes and schools, in each Diocese, in our country and across our global Catholic community. It is a providential moment for reflecting on how we can know our faith and make it better known through the modern means of communications, through art, through renewal of many of the traditional practices of our faith such as pilgrimages to Marian Shrines and holy sites, through celebration and knowledge of the Irish saints and through a host of other activities.

In the words of Pope Benedict in announcing the *Year of Faith*, 'Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.'³ This is our ultimate hope for the *Year of Faith*; that many will come to know the love of Christ again, through us and through the life of the Church, as an experience of grace and joy. This is the key to the new Evangelisation.

NOTES

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, (11 October 2011), n.2.

² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6 January 2001), 57: AAS 93 (2001), 308.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, (11 October 2011), n.7.

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