

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
Mass for the Opening of the Year of Faith
11 Oct 12



My family made a trip to Europe in 1964, which included a visit to the Vatican. My oldest brother kept telling me that I would not appreciate the dimensions of the Basilica of St. Peter, because it was filled with the elaborate red damask stadium-like seats for the Second Vatican Council. Unlike the policy of Cardinal Noe when he was Archpriest of the Basilica or Msgr. Rossi, it was decided that the special benches would stay up from 1962 until the conclusion of the Council in November 1965! I must say that seeing the Vatican Basilica set up for the Council and then seeing it as a student and long-time Roman resident were two very different experiences.

Tonight we begin together as a Church, an experience, a pilgrimage, and a special Year of Faith. We are like the Vatican Basilica, spacious and open to the action of the Holy Spirit. We begin with a challenge to grow, to be more authentic signs of the Risen One as we make His Presence more evident in our world.

The Holy Father has invited us to understand more profoundly that the foundation of the Christian faith is “the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”¹

This Person, Jesus Christ, loves us unconditionally and calls us to realize the fullness of our baptismal vocation. We have just heard St. Luke tell us about the expansion of the Church in the years 46 and 47AD. It was the springtime of the Church: many heard the message of faith and followed the teaching of Jesus. A youthful enthusiasm filled the communities. Think about the lived faith experience on the campus around us. Think about the enthusiasm at, for example, Franciscan University in Steubenville, Texas A&M, or other places!

The newness of the Gospel transformed people. The Year of faith calls us to capture that spirit in our communities, once again. Faith in Jesus Christ is never old; it is never a shackle; and it never represses us. It is a vibrant gift that can transform us in as much as we are ready to embrace the challenge issued by the Lord and Savior and

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily for the Baptism of the Lord, 10.I.10.

embrace His Way. "Living faith opens the heart to the grace of God which frees us from pessimism."²

We know that the history of the primitive Church was not only a series of advancements, joy, and victory. Human nature and the world have not changed that much in 2,000 years. Even when Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles, there were jealousies, sin, and the rumblings of persecution from those who were opposed. The community was challenged to persevere. In fact, Paul and Barnabas are visiting recently-evangelized communities so as to confirm their faith as the persecution begins in earnest. The second reading was also addressed to a community experiencing its first persecutions. We should not be surprised when things get complicated, when the Federal Government tries to oblige us to sin, or when we are held up for ridicule. It has all happened before. Remember: while those who persecuted in the past are in history books, the Church, the People of God, is still here and vibrant!

Our hope, and we are a people of hope, must fix its eyes on the final victory, rather than on the vicissitudes of our passing age, so St. Luke teaches us. It is never easy to remain faithful in the face of oppression and opposition. Today a very secularized contemporary society pushes us toward a very personal religious practice, shut into our churches and without comment on the public square.

Challenges and persecution are the refiner's fire to render the faith ever purer and solid. As we have just heard in the second reading: "In this you rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer through various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that is perishable even though tested by fire, may prove to be for praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

We need the entire Catholic community to come together to celebrate our faith, to ensure the correct instruction of the young and neophytes, and to prod us into deeper growth. The Church might be a small remnant, but it has the mission of leaven to ferment the whole mass; with the vocation of perfume to penetrate the fetid hordes who long to experience the fragrance of the truth about Jesus Christ.

In his baptismal homily Peter charges that community to flourish in the elements of a lived faith. It is a slow, but sure growth, but a lived faith has always attracted attention. The daily transformation of each person through death to self and to pride should bring us from the decadence of sin to the fullness of new life. Know how to recognize the ideal model to which one must be conformed. The power of the Risen Lord is the source of fraternal communion. He frees us from selfish tendencies; based on faith in His victory and in His joy. Faith is precious, do we recognize it?

In it we find the source of fraternal communion and we recognize the importance of each person and his or her contribution: "'None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.' 'If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together....In this solidarity with all men, living or dead, which is founded on the

² Ibid., homily for the opening of the Year of Faith, 11.X.12.

communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the profit of all. Every sin harms this communion.”³

Are we, therefore, still a sign of the Risen One? Do we live that enthusiasm? Can we point the way to Christ? Or are we gray, blah, whatever? The Year of Faith asks that question and missions us with the enthusiasm of a new disciple. Peter helps us appreciate the gift that is the baptismal vocation.

As we celebrate the door of faith throughout this year, it is good for us to ask how we experience the Lord's presence. How is it that He still walks among us, pilgrims traveling to our definitive dwelling place?

Of the ways He is present, we think first of all of the Eucharist. This gift of the Lord Jesus, body, blood, soul, and divinity is certainly the most exalted presence of the Lord in our midst. Is that not why we have come to this magnificent basilica this afternoon? In this sacrament Christ makes Himself nourishment and presence for everyone everywhere. There are no barriers of time, space, or of any other type.

We also recall and celebrate His presence in us, in the hearts of those who love Him. By the mystery of our baptism each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit. We certainly must respect and nourish this presence. We appreciate it in the ministry and the work of the twelve Apostles who form the college, who received a mission to the end of time. Apostolic authority corresponds to the will of the Lord, because He knows of our difficulties and of human weakness. Fidelity is not easy and we do not always perceive the presence of the Lord. The sins of selfishness, conflict, shortsightedness, and so forth can compromise the unity of the Church. We have seen it in the past and we still experience it.

The Year of Faith offers us an opportunity to celebrate the effects of baptism in us and to renew the Profession of faith that led us or those who presented us for the saving waters of the fount. The Gospel reminds us of the Lord's charge to baptize all nations.

That is a charge given to the community of faith until the end of time. The Trinitarian life that is ours is a dynamic grace that urges us forth to share what we have received during this time of renewal. We are also called to be signs and instruments of hope in a shattered world. The Holy Father reminded us that those with hope lead different lives. Perhaps the Year of Faith is an invitation to dare to be different, to be evangelical in the authentic sense of the word.

The year of faith calls us to renew our understanding of the content of the message of salvation. We are invited to study and memorize the Nicene Creed and to appreciate anew its richness. It is a time to commit ourselves to faithfulness in all things revealed—both that which is difficult and that which seems simpler. This is a moment of grace to understand the Catechism better. Another excellent idea would be to reread the Documents of the Vatican II so as to learn what indeed the Council Fathers said and not merely what others tell us they meant to say.

³ CCC 953.

Remember that the college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council.”⁴

Indeed, you can look at the Basilica of St. Peter when it is empty and be struck by its vast expanse of space. The same is true of the great upper Basilica here. However, these structures come alive when they are filled with women and men of faith who gather to be nourished and leave to share what they have received. May the Year of Faith renew and fortify us in our pilgrimage to life without end.

⁴ CIC, 337,§1.