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Retreat on Living Religiously By Faith in the Year of Faith
Sisters of Jesus our Hope, Bloomfield, New Jersey
July 29 to August 2, 2013
Ex 32:15-24; 30-34; Ps 106; Lk 10:38-42

The Hunger to Grow in Faith During this Year of Faith

- Introduction
 - We begin this retreat on the Living Religiously by Faith in the Year of Faith. An ecclesiastical holy year is meant to influence everything we do throughout that year, the way we do our private prayer, the way we celebrate Mass, the way we live our Christian life, and certainly the way we make a retreat. This retreat is meant to be not only about faith but preached, received and lived with faith.
 - Neither Pope Benedict nor Pope Francis has chosen an official theme for this Year of Faith, but if were nominated, I am rather certain it would be “Audage nobis fidem,” Lord, increase our faith, that plea of Jesus’ first followers who already had faith but knew they needed more. In response to that petition, Jesus replied that if they had the faith the size of a mustard seed, they could do great things, they could move mountains, because then the Lord would be able to work through them to bring the greatest gifts of all to the world.
 - While “Lord, increase our faith,” is not the official theme of the Year of Faith throughout the Church, it constitutes the underlying theme and petition of this retreat.
 - The Lord tells us that if we have the faith the size of a tiny mustard seed it’s already something far more powerful than big backhoes. But he doesn’t want our faith to remain the size of a mustard seed. He wants it to grow.
 - Prophecy of Ezekiel 47.
 - So our faith is meant to grow, as we progress in the living relationship with Jesus.
 - Each of us here is a little like the father who met Jesus after he had come down the mountain of the Transfiguration. He son was possessed with a spirit that made him mute. He went to the disciples and asked them to expunge it, but they couldn’t. He turned to Jesus and said, “If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” Jesus’ response is lapidary: “If you can!” Then he said, “Everything is possible to one who has faith.” That’s when the father exclaimed, “I do believe, help my unbelief!”
 - We do have faith. It’s what has led us to discover our vocations and to say yes to the Lord. But often, rather than feeling powerful in faith, we sense our weakness. We’re all too aware of the ways we don’t live by faith. In the midst of a world and even many parts of the Church that are becoming increasingly secular, where people are living as if God doesn’t exist, as practical atheists, it’s become harder to live by faith. That’s why we cry out, “Lord, I do believe. But help my unbelief!”
 - We know that in the Gospel the greatest compliments Jesus ever gave were about faith. “O Woman, great is your faith,” Jesus said to a pagan woman in Tyre after she with beautiful perseverance begged Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus publicly marveled about the deep faith of a Roman centurion who showed total confidence that Jesus could heal his servant simply by saying a word a great distance away. He likewise praised the faith of his own mother as one who heard, believed into practice the Word of God (Lk 11:28), indicating, as the early saints of the Church beautifully noted, that before she had conceived the Word of God in her womb, she had already conceived him in faith in her heart.
 - In contrast to these great icons of faith, there are also figures of little or no faith. Jesus reproved the apostles on four occasions because of their “little faith.” Jesus wasn’t able to work miracles in various places, including his hometown of Nazareth, because he was amazed at their lack of faith. He candidly called out many of his contemporaries for being a “faithless and perverse generation” (Mt 17:7). And forebodingly, Jesus wondered aloud about his second coming: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8).

- In this retreat during which it's common for us to meditate on our life and on our death, on the gift of time and how we are called to make the most of it, about who we are, what we seek, and where we're going, it's important for us, during this Year of Faith, to focus on what we hope Jesus would say to us if he were to come right now, if he were to come at the end of this Year of Faith, or whenever he comes: Would he compliment us for our "great faith" or reprove us for our "little faith"? If he were to come today, would he find faith in us? All of us this year in the Church — whether we've got faith the size of a mustard seed or smaller, whether we, by his mercy, have been living by faith for years — we need to imitate the apostles and beg, "Lord, increase our faith!"
- That's what this retreat is about, precisely to help us focus on our faith and grow in our faith, and make us capable of being the Lord's contagious instruments to help others grow in faith.
- This morning's talk is, as an introduction to the importance of the Year of Faith, dedicated to the hunger to grow in faith, which is the starting point of our entire discussion. It's our desire to grow in faith. God's grace is all powerful but the one thing he doesn't do for us is to respond for us. He proposes, He calls. He summons. He knocks. But he doesn't take away our free response. That's for us. If we wish to grow in faith, and turn to him in prayer, he will not give us a stone when we ask for this bread.
- This afternoon and tomorrow morning, we will ponder the new encyclical Lumen Fidei and how it is meant to help us to indicate the horizons for our growth in faith during this Year. And then we'll apply its insights over the course of the rest of the week with regard to our prayer, to the way we live the Mass, to our approach of the Lord's mercy, to our consecrated life, to our poverty, our chastity and our obedience, so that we might live each of these areas with increased faith.
- Hunger to Grow in Faith
 - Before we delve into the topic of the hunger to grow in faith, we need to understand better the two aspects of faith, because during this Year we're called to grow in both.
 - When we talk about faith, we mean both the things we believe — like what we profess in the Creed, like our belief in Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist, like our faith in the possibility of heaven, etc. — and the trust we have in God.
 - The CCC tells us, "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth God has revealed."
 - We believe in something on the basis of a belief in someone.
 - CCC 156 What moves us to believe is not the fact that revealed truths appear as true and intelligible in the light of our natural reason: we believe "because of the authority of God himself who reveals them, who can neither deceive nor be deceived".
 - You believe I'm 43 because you trust in me to tell you the truth.
 - Likewise, we believe in the truths of the faith because we believe in God, who sent his Son, who founded a Church, who sent the Holy Spirit to guide her into all truth and prevent her from being wrong about what we need to believe or do in order to please God and enter into his life.
 - We see this type of faith in St. Peter.
 - Putting out into the deep to lower his nets. He trusts in Jesus enough to do what he says. We know what happens.
 - His teaching about the Eucharist.
 - We see it in Mary.
 - Believes immediately in the miracle of the Virginal Conception and acts on the other information, that her elderly post-menopausal cousin Elizabeth has conceived a son, going immediately to help her.
 - This is the first way we're called to grow in faith in this Year of Faith, to grow in our total trust of God, in our personal adherence to him with confidence and love.
 - Abraham as a real model for faith.
 - We know well the story of Abraham, who to this day is called the Father of Faith by Christians, by Jews and even by Muslims. He shows us very clearly what real faith is, the type of faith God calls each of us to. When he was 75 years old — well past retirement age

for people today — the Lord called to him while he was in Ur of the Chaldeans (modern-day Iraq) and told him to leave the land of his kinfolk and go to a land he would show him. God was asking him to pack up his bags completely and leave everything behind, his language, his land, everything. And he was 75. But he did it. And God gave him a promise, one that would have sounded crazy to Abraham and his wife, Sara, who were childless at the time. “I will make of you a great nation.” Eventually God changed Abram’s name to Abraham, which means “Father of many nations.” How could Abraham become a great nation if he and his wife had been unable to have children for the very likely fifty-plus years of marriage? Yet Abram believed again. They took all of their possessions and left going to whatever place the Lord would show them. The Lord led them to Canaan, where he said, “to your descendants I will give this land.” But little did Abram know that he was going to have to fight for the land, against several kings. After they were settled, Abram and Sara tried for 10 years to have a child but were unsuccessful. But he continued to believe, even though it wouldn’t make much sense. And when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 91, Sarah gave birth to Isaac, who was destined, Abraham thought, to be the one through whom God would make Abraham the father of many nations. Fast-forward 13 years, when Abraham is 113. God decided to test Abraham’s faith to the utmost. God asked Abraham to go to Mt. Moriah, which is a hill in Jerusalem, and there sacrifice his son, the son for whom he had waited for a century, his hope, pride and joy. Abraham did what the Lord wanted, even though it would have seemed so contradictory. He did hoping that God himself would provide the lamb for the Holocaust. Isaac the Son carried the wood. Abraham built the altar and then was prepared to sacrifice his own son to the Lord — something that the canannite pagans were accustomed to do — before the angel of the Lord held his hand and told Abraham not to harm the boy in the least. But Abraham was willing to sacrifice everything, even the one he loved most, because of his faith in God, because he loved God even more than he loved his son.

- The reason is because of what we read in the Letter to the Hebrews, which focuses beautifully on the faith of Abraham and calls us to imitate it.
 - Heb 11:8: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. ...By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, 18 of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.” 19 He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.
- Faith means that we’re able to trust in God, we’re willing to do even what at a worldly level seems inexplicable because we trust in God and in his goodness. This is the first way God wants us to grow this Year of Faith and over the course of this retreat.
 - We’re called to have the same faith as Abraham, our father in faith. We need to imitate his complete trust in God, no matter what we’re asked to do. Whether we’re young, or whether we’re 100 years old, we’re still called to follow the Lord, to trust in him, and to make him truly #1 in our lives. We’re called to imitate Abraham’s choices. If we prefer to have a quiet retirement, but God wants to uproot us and lead us to a place we’d rather not go, we choose to go. If science and common sense tell us that something is impossible — like the conception of Isaac to two who make even seniors citizens look young — but God says it will happen, we believe God. If God tells us to sacrifice, or to put in second place, something

we hold absolutely dear so that we might keep the Lord in first place, we're called to do it. God needs to come first. If it's a choice between our will and his will, His will be done. There should be nothing we wouldn't sacrifice if the Lord were asking us; if we're unwilling to sacrifice something, well, then that something is our god, and God isn't God.

- This faith, understood as total entrusting of ourselves to God and because of that commitment, to what he said and said, is in crisis today. Many people who know what Jesus has done and taught just don't believe.
 - Many who know, for example, that Jesus speaks about forgiving 70x7 and yet to hold grudges and seek revenge.
 - Many know that he eagerly desires to eat the Passover of the Eucharist with us at least each Sunday put work, sports, sleep and so many other things above Sunday Mass.
 - Many know that he established the Sacrament of Penance on Easter Sunday Evening, still nevertheless avoid the Sacrament of Penance for years.
 - Many know that he and the Church speak very forcefully about the meaning of marriage as an indissoluble union of one man and one woman from the beginning and yet divorce and remarry or support husbandless or wifeless pseudomarrriages.
 - Many know that he ordained only men even though he exalted so many woman way above the cultural customs of the time — from his Mother, to Mary Magdalene, to Mary and Martha of Bethany, to the women who cared for him and the apostles — but they still insist that women should be ordained priests. They imply, of course, that in not ordaining women, Jesus was either a misogynist discriminating against women, or too weak to do something extraordinary, or that he simply didn't know what we was doing as well as they are.
 - And many are doing this not out of weakness but out of deliberate choice. They're not doing this out of ignorance of what Jesus has taught, but they just do not trust in him enough to recognize that to believe in him means to believe in what he said and did.
- The second aspect of growth in faith is growth in our knowledge of the faith.
 - There is a widespread religious illiteracy among Catholics that has been much commented upon. Even though so many Catholics now receive a very long education, not just elementary and junior high schools, but finish high school, finish college and many go on to graduate school and doctorates, few know their faith adequately. So many Catholics know far more about sports statistics or celebrity trivia than they know about the faith. So many know much more about their profession than they know about the faith, even though the faith is the most important reality of all.
 - I've seen this in several areas, as I'm sure you have:
 - How many people define the immaculate conception as Jesus' conception rather than Mary's?
 - How many people think that those who are divorced can't receive Holy Communion? Or that everyone can?
 - Everybody gets to heaven. "He or she is in a better place."
 - Vasectomies and IVF.
 - This is a failure in our catechesis. But it's also a personal failure on the part of many not to hunger to learn the faith, to get to know the answers.
 - A couple of years ago there was a U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. It showed that atheists and agnostics proved they had a greater comparative religious knowledge than Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Mormons. The survey polled 3,412 Americans 18 and older and asked 32 questions about their own faith and other religions. Atheists and agnostics scored the highest, correctly answering on

average 20.9 questions; they were followed by Jews at 20.5, Mormons at 20.3, and Protestants at 16.0 and Catholics 14.7.

- These results should be embarrassing to U.S. Catholics and particularly to all those involved in Catholic education. It's true that there may not be a reason to panic that those of other religions or no religion at all are more easily able to recognize the Hindu figures Vishnu and Shiva or to identify famous religious figures such as Jonathan Edwards, the Dalai Lama, Joseph Smith, and Martin Luther. But there is clearly reason for serious concern when atheists show a much greater grasp of the books of the Bible and key Bible figures than Catholics do.
- Of the 32 questions on the survey, nine were those that every adult Catholic legitimately should have been able to answer. I'd encourage you to see if you know these answers as we go forward and to see if your spouse or your kids or your friends would likely know them:
 - What is the first book of the Bible?
 - What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
 - Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
 - Which of these is *not* in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others as you would have them do unto you; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; or keep holy the Sabbath day?
 - Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Elijah, Moses, Job or Abraham?
 - Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Elijah, Moses, Job or Abraham?
 - Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Elijah, Moses, Job or Abraham?
 - What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? The bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Jesus Christ? Or the bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ?
 - Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
- What were the results? With regard to the seven Biblical questions:
 - Only 42 percent of Catholics could name Genesis as the first book of the Bible (compared to 71 percent of atheists and agnostics, 85 percent of Mormons, 76 percent of Protestants and 65 percent of Jews).
 - Just 33 percent of Catholics could name the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (compared to 39 percent of atheists and agnostics, 73 percent of Mormons, 57 percent of Protestants and 17 percent of Jews).
 - Only 54 percent of Catholics could name Bethlehem as Jesus' native place (bested again by 70 percent of atheists and agnostics, 78 percent of Protestants, 83 percent of Mormons and 61 percent of Jews).
 - 57 percent of Catholics knew that the Golden Rule wasn't one of the Ten Commandments (which compared to 62 percent of atheists and agnostics, 56 percent of Protestants, 81 percent of Muslims, 62 percent of Jews).
 - Only 25 percent of Catholics could identify the sufferings of Job (in comparison with 42 percent of atheists, 70 percent of Mormons, 48 percent of Protestants and 47 percent of Jews).
 - 65 percent of Catholics correctly identified Moses as the leader of the exodus (which was still far less than the 87% of atheists and agnostics, 92 percent of Mormons, 74 percent of Protestants and 90 percent of Jews).

- 55 percent of Catholics identified Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac (compared to 68 percent of atheists and agnostics, 87 percent of Mormons, 63 percent of Protestants and 83 percent of Jews).
- In terms of the knowledge of the Old Testament and New Testament, Mormons overall correctly answered 5.7 of the 7 questions, white evangelical Protestants got 5.1, atheists and agnostics 4.4, black Protestants 4.4, Jews 4.3 (including 14 percent of Jews who got both New Testament questions correct), white mainline Protestants 3.9, white Catholics 3.8, and Latino Catholics (who could take the survey in either Spanish or English) 2.4. Overall Catholics answered 3.4 questions correctly.
- The Biblical questions posed on the Pew Survey did not concern trivial matters that those who might have a strong grasp of the content of the Bible could easily miss. They were designed so that those familiar with the central content should readily have gotten them. Failure to be able to identify the Book of Genesis implies an ignorance of the revealed truths about the creation of the world and of the human person. The inability to name the Gospel writers seems to indicate a general lack of familiarity with what they wrote of Jesus. Anyone who has ever read the book of Job could never forget the story or the name of the central figure. The inability to identify the most dramatic moment in the life of Abraham points implies a general ignorance of the common father of faith of Christians, Jews and Muslims. And the incapacity of more than a third of Catholics to recognize Moses from a line-up suggests that they have never spent much time thinking about the central event of the Old Testament or seen one of many movies that depict it. From the point of view of faith formation, these failures are the equivalent of Americans’ failing to know the first letter of the alphabet, the names of the four seasons of the year, and the location of the nation’s capital — not to mention being unable to identify George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King from a multiple-choice lineup.
- The poor results in terms of Biblical literacy extended into the realm of Catholic theology. With regard to the specifically Catholic question about the Eucharist, only 55 percent of Catholics knew Catholic teaching, that the bread and wine become Jesus’ body and blood. Although Catholics did recognize this belief more than other groups (which ranged from 33-41 percent), it’s hard to take much comfort when 41 percent of Catholics thought that Church teaching was that bread and wine were merely symbols and four percent had no answer. With regard to the famous Protestant Reformation battle cry of *sola fides*, only nine percent of Catholics recognized it as Protestant alone (compared to 22 percent of atheists and agnostics, 22 percent of Mormons, 16 percent of Protestants and ten percent of Jews).
- The Pew Forum statisticians did extensive analysis of the data. They showed that several factors influenced better results on the survey: the higher one’s formal education; the greater one’s commitment to frequent practice of one’s religion; the more one read Scripture and books and websites about one’s own religion; the more one read about other religions; and the more one spoke about religion with family or friends. These all point to choices and behaviors that parents, pastors, professors, Catholic school teachers and catechists should be aware of and encourage.
- Over the last few years of his pontificate, Pope Benedict spoke quite a bit about what he calls an “educational emergency,” a large component of which comes from Catholic illiteracy about the basics of the faith. On February 23 last year, meeting with the priests of Rome at the beginning of Lent, Pope Benedict said,
 - Faith is not only a personal act of trust, but an act that has a content. The *fides qua* demands the *fides quae*, the content of faith. ... Faith has a content and it is not sufficient, it is not an element of unification unless this content of the one faith is lived and professed. Therefore “The Year of Faith”, the Year of Catechism — to be very practical — are linked inseparably. We shall renew the Church only by renewing the content — later summed up again — of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. A serious problem for the Church today is the lack of knowledge of the

faith, “religious illiteracy, and with this illiteracy we are unable to grow, unity is unable to grow. We ourselves must therefore recover this content, as a wealth of unity, not a packet of dogmas and orders but a unique reality that is revealed in its depths and beauty. We must do our utmost for a catechetical renewal, so that the faith may be known and in this way God may be known, Christ may be known, the truth may be known, so that unity may develop in truth.

- As the Pew Survey confirms, many U.S. Catholic “schools” — from parishes, to homes, to educational institutions — are failing badly in fulfilling their duty to pass on the faith. They’re not remedying religious illiteracy. Catechetical programs for young children that cumulatively take up about one day a year of instruction are obviously inadequate. Parishes that offer little or no adult education, or where parishioners do not take advantage of what is offered, are clearly deficient. Families and individuals who fail to read the Bible are neglecting one of their most basic responsibilities.
 - As St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” It’s therefore a sad day, and one that must lead to individual and ecclesial conversion, when atheists know the basics of Sacred Scripture better than those who say they not only know but follow Christ.
 - So in this Year of Faith, we have to address this religious illiteracy and begin to overcome it.
 - And we have to admit that while among priests and religious there’s not a religious illiteracy there is among many far less a knowledge of the faith than what there ought to be. Relatively few study their faith as they should. When a papal encyclical or exhortation comes out, very few read it. Among those ordained or professed prior to 1992, very few have read the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Most have never read the whole Bible. Few have read, and even fewer re-read, the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Many priests and religious are simply not growing in their fides quae anywhere near as much as the Church would want. And that’s because of a lack of hunger, which brings us back to our theme.
- Hunger to grow in faith
 - The Lord desires to increase our faith this year, both in terms of our trust in him like Abraham and so many of the saints as well as in terms of our knowledge of the the truths of our faith so that we can live by them and pass them on.
 - But now we need to turn to whether we have the same desire to grow in faith.
 - One of the main crises facing the Church today, the laity, the priesthood, and religious life, is the crisis of tepidity. People are going through the motions of faith. They show up but they’re not all there.
 - Pope Benedict focused on it last October 7 in a talk in preparation for the Year of Faith. He said, “There’s a passion of ours that must grow from faith, which must be transformed into the fire of charity. Jesus said: I came to cast fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled. Origen has conveyed us a word of the Lord: “Whoever is near me is near the fire.” The Christian must not be lukewarm. The Book of Revelation tells us that this is the greatest danger for a Christian: not that he may say no, but that he may say a very lukewarm yes. This being lukewarm is what discredits Christianity. Faith must become in us flame of love, flame that really fires up my being, becomes the great passion of my being, and so it fires also my neighbor.”
 - Many of us don’t have this fire. One of the reasons is because we don’t have anywhere near the real relationship with God that he desires for us. We don’t live in the mad, passionate love he has for us. We don’t really love him back, in the sense that we make sacrifices for him.
 - A second reason we don’t have this fire is because we displace our passions for too many things of this world. So many in the world squander that fire rooting for their favorite sports teams, for the music of a particular singer, for details and photos of the life of some reality star or Hollywood celebrity, for high tech video games, and supporters of particular political candidates, or for work, for food or drink, for their cars, for their clothing or jewelry, or for exercise, or for other worldly pursuits, and these more immediate passions can make them apathetic to the things that matter

most. Priests and religious are not immune from the squandering of these passions, putting more passion into a particular hobby than we do our study or even on occasion our prayer.

- Jesus talked about tepidity in the Book of Revelation. He gave a message to the Church of Laodicea which said, “To the angel of the church in La-odicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation. ‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.’” Then he says why, “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see.”
- Pope Benedict focused on how materialism and this worldly obsessions can rob us of our passion for God in his 2007 encyclical “Saved by Hope.” He noted that faith and hope are very closely related and he said one of the reasons why we love the “Great hope” for God, for heaven, for holiness, is because we spend so much of our time focuses on this worldly lesser hopes. “We need the greater and lesser hopes that keep us going day by day. But these are not enough without the great hope, which must surpass everything else. This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain..”
- So we need to focus on our desires, on the real passions of our life, on our loves, in order to be able to live by faith. Jesus tells us, “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be,” and if our treasure is in this worldly stuff, our heart will necessarily be tepid toward the things of God.
 - 1Tim. 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs.
- How do we grow in faith?
 - With the help of *Lumen Fidei*, we’re going to be examining lots of practical ways we can respond to the Lord’s graces to grow in faith this year, but we can ponder a few practical things at the outset.
 - Acts of faith
 - Entrusting ourselves to God.
 - Prayer! This is faith in action. We can also ask for an increase in faith.
 - Faith is a gift of God.
 - CCC 153 When St. Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that this revelation did not come "from flesh and blood", but from "my Father who is in heaven".[24] Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him.
 - Faith is ultimately an encounter with the Lord, not with an idea or a project of life.
 - Believers, so Saint Augustine tells us, “strengthen themselves by believing”.
 - Only through believing, then, does faith grow and become stronger;
 - there is no other possibility for possessing certitude with regard to one’s life apart from self-abandonment, in a continuous crescendo, into the hands of a love that seems to grow constantly because it has its origin in God.
 - Learning and Treasuring the things of God.
 - St. Paul said, “I have passed onto you as of first importance what I myself received.”
 - Getting to know the Catechism. The faith of the Church. Getting to know God through Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments.
 - Have to use our freedom well:
 - CCC 154 Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act. Trusting in God and cleaving to the truths he has revealed is contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason. Even in human relations it is not contrary to our dignity to believe what other persons tell us about themselves and their intentions,

or to trust their promises (for example, when a man and a woman marry) to share a communion of life with one another.

- Pope Benedict calls us to rediscover the “precious gift of faith.”
- Seeking to pass the faith on to others
 - We always pass along great deals. We pass on great diet plans. But as priests and religious, do we pass on the faith with love and conviction rather than as a duty?
 - We have the cure for death.
 - “Seeing their faith,” Jesus gave a double-miracle to the paralytic. What friends are we bringing to Jesus? To which friends are we bringing Jesus?
 - Benedict XVI in Porta Fidei:
 - **Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.**
 - Pope Francis talked about the way we’re called to pass on the faith in a very strong talk to the bishops on Saturday. We’re supposed to accompany those who are wandering away from “Jerusalem,” like Jesus accompanied the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, and we need to have the type of warmth that explains things in the light of faith that can make their hearts burn.
- Living by faith
 - Faith is incomplete unless it leads to active love
 - Gal. 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.
 - James 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. 18 But some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.
- Surrounding ourselves by the saints
 - Not just those who have died, but the holy ones here on earth.
 - We eventually become like our friends. It’s important to surround ourselves by people of faith. It’s important for parents to create this culture of faith at home.
 - Pope Benedict talks about the importance of the Church, that the professional of faith is not just personal but communitarian.
 - CCC 165 It is then we must turn to the witnesses of faith: to Abraham, who "in hope... believed against hope"; to the Virgin Mary, who, in "her pilgrimage of faith", walked into the "night of faith" in sharing the darkness of her son's suffering and death; and to so many others: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."
 - Pope Benedict XVI at the end of Porta Fidei.
- Avoiding too many challenges to our faith
 - These can be conversations, books, programs on television and the radio, music, learning environments, that can undermine our faith.
 - 1Tim. 6:20 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, 21 for by professing it some have missed the mark as regards the faith.
 - Oct 17: **The processes of secularization and a widespread nihilistic mentality** in which all is relative have deeply marked the common mindset. Thus life is often lived frivolously, with no clear ideals or well-founded hopes, and within fluid and temporary social ties. Above all the new generations are not taught the truth nor the profound meaning of existence that surmounts the contingent situation, nor permanent affections and trust. **Relativism leads, on the contrary, to having no reference points, suspicion**

and volubility break up human relations, while life is lived in brief experiments without the assumption of responsibility. If individualism and relativism seem to dominate the minds of many of our contemporaries, it cannot be said that believers are completely immune to these danger. ... **Christians often do not even know the central core of their own Catholic faith, the Creed, so that they leave room for a certain syncretism and religious relativism, blurring the truths to believe in as well as the salvific uniqueness of Christianity. The risk of fabricating, as it were, a “do-it-yourself” religion is not so far off today. Instead we must return to God, to the God of Jesus Christ, we must rediscover the Gospel message and make it enter our consciences and our daily life more deeply.**

- Suffering well
 - Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by **faith** in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
 - Can challenge our faith. Make us better or bitter. Faith of the martyrs grew in suffering, and strengthened the faith of the whole Church.
 - First reading of today’s Daily Mass from Heb 10, that they were able to undergo plundering of property because they knew they had a greater treasure.
- Perseverance, not quitting
 - CCC 162 We can lose this priceless gift [of faith. To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith; it must be "working through charity," abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church.
 - 2Tim. 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the **faith**.
 - 1 Tim 6:12 Fight the good fight of the **faith**; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
- Concluding thoughts
 - Faith is a life-long journey
 - PF 1. The “door of faith” (*Acts 14:27*) 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*. It begins with baptism (cf. *Rom 6:4*), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. *Jn 17:22*). ...
 - 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
 - During the homily at the Mass marking the inauguration of my pontificate I said: “The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.”
 - It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to 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. Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people”
 - Purpose of the year of faith is the renewal of the Church, by our own interior renewal in faith.

- Renewal of the Church
 - The renewal of the Church is also achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers: by their very existence in the world, Christians are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us.
 - LG: The Church ... clasping sinners to its bosom, at once holy and always in need of purification, follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.
 - By the power of the risen Lord it is given strength to overcome, in patience and in love, its sorrow and its difficulties, both those that are from within and those that are from without, so that it may reveal in the world, faithfully, although with shadows, the mystery of its Lord until, in the end, it shall be manifested in full light.”
- Conversion to faith working through love
 - The Year of Faith, from this perspective, is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Saviour of the world.
 - Through faith, this new [converted] life shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the resurrection. To the extent that he 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” (Gal 5:6) becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of man’s life (cf. *Rom 12:2; Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:20-29; 2 Cor 5:17*).
- Live this retreat with faith
 - Put out into the deep.
 - Keep exterior silence so that you can hear God speaking to you in your interior silence.
 - Make not only a good confession but ask the Holy Spirit for the graces to make the best confession of your life, the most faithful confession you’ve ever made.
 - The Lord has been waiting since the foundation of the world to respond to the petition we’ll be making to him throughout this retreat, “Domine, adauge nobis fidem!,” “Lord, increase our faith!” Let’s open up our hearts to that long-awaited and much-needed gift!