

THEME - 1

Reflections on the Conclusion of the Year of Faith

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1. Introduction

On October 11, 2011, Pope Benedict XVI convoked the Year of Faith with his apostolic letter, *Porta Fidei*. My attention was drawn to the following words:

"During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the 'pioneer and perfecter of our faith' (Heb. 12:2): in him, all the anguish and all the longing of the human heart finds fulfillment. The joy of love, the answer to the drama of suffering and pain, the power of forgiveness in the face of an offence received and the victory of life over the emptiness of death: all this finds fulfillment in the mystery of his Incarnation, in his becoming man, in his sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of his resurrection" (Porta Fidei, #13).

In fact, the letter invites us to focus our attention and to center our heart and our life on the person of Jesus Christ. Beside the gospels, I believe the document that can most help us in this regard is the Letter to the Hebrews. The entire letter, from the beginning to the end, speaks about the person of Jesus... his divinity and humanity, his passion and death and resurrection, the attainment of eternal redemption.

The opening of this letter might surprise us since they do not follow the traditional structure of that literary genre. It begins by highlighting the superiority of the incarnate Son of God and alludes to the fact that Christ's word is more excellent than the word of all the previous prophets who preceded him. Christ was constituted the heir of all things and through him the universe was created; thus Christ is the refulgence of God's glory and the very imprint of God's being.

The differences in speaking in this manner are explicitly stated at the beginning of this letter: the past was characterized by a multiplicity of persons who spoke in the name of God and thus the content of their message was provisional. In these last days, the Word of God is communicated to us through the ministry of one person, Jesus Christ, and his message is definitive and complete... the content of his message is clear.

This important nuance of the affirmation, that is, that in the past as well as now in the present the same person is speaking... this reality is

highlighted in an extraordinary manner in the gospel of Saint John who attributes the words that Christ proclaims, as well as the works that he accomplishes, to the Father¹.

Following this same argument, we find a very eloquent statement in the dogmatic constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*:

"This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them. By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation" (Dei Verbum, #2).

In John's Gospel, this theme receives great emphasis: in addition to the repeated references to Jesus' preaching where he attributes to the Father the gospel that he preaches and the revelations that he makes known to the community, John's Gospel also develops from the very beginning, a concentric and progressive dynamism.

The central affirmation of John's Gospel, "the Word of God was made flesh", is like the heart that constantly pulsates throughout the entire narration of the fourth gospel. It is the sign par excellence that God has given to the world in order to make tangible and understandable the love that has motivated and maintained his uninterrupted action into the present time.

Therefore it is right to highlight the profound significance of this sign in order to learn how to focus our gaze and our understanding on the person of Jesus. After turning over the tables of the money changers and spilling their coins on the ground, Jesus told them: "*Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up*" (Jn. 2:19-22). But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When Jesus rose from the dead his disciples remembered what he had said and they believed in the Scriptures and in the words that Jesus had spoken. *Dei Verbum* affirms:

¹ Cf., John 5:19, 7:16, 8:28, 10:37-38, 12:44-45, 14:24. These references, though seemingly repetitious, offer some interesting nuances and variations that enrich the meaning of the affirmation. These are the words that Jesus speaks and the actions that he accomplishes in the name of the Father, words and actions that verify and reveal his true identity as the only begotten Son. Accepting in faith Jesus' words and actions leads us to a true knowledge of the Father. Another reality that we should be mindful of with regard to the fourth gospel is the plurality of meanings that can be given to the same word, in other words, the distinct realities that a word might designate. Perhaps it would be better in this case to say that the same word can refer to distinct levels or dimensions of the same reality (some examples would be bread, water, spirit, birth, life, etc.).

"It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our savior" (Dei Verbum, #18).

In his apostolic letter, *Porta Fidei*, Benedict XVI alludes to the reasons that led him to convoke the Year of Faith. His reasons are expressed in a summary manner: God's continual invitation to us to enter the realm of faith, to enter into a relationship of friendship with the three persons of the Blessed Trinity; the mission of the Church to rescue men and women from the desert oasis of life and lead them to the One who gives the fullness of life; to discover anew the joy that is present in the Word of God and the bread of life and to believe that Jesus Christ will accomplish his work.

It is true that this introduction has been a little extensive but it seems to me that this is justified given the importance that the letter to the Hebrews places on the Word and given the fact that one of the most crucial implications for believers during this celebration of the Year of Faith is to recall the more important aspects of the recent solemn teaching of the Church and to do this at the same time that they celebrate their personal and their community encounter with the risen Christ.

2. The person of Jesus Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews

I would like to contrast two brief but very significant New Testament affirmations. John expressed it in the following words: *"And we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth"* (John 1:14). For the author of the letter to Hebrews, these words reveal the primary characteristics of the person of Christ, the most profound dimensions of his identity.

It is here that the two natures of the person of Christ are clearly revealed: his humanity and his divinity; his mercy and his fidelity... a clear reflection of his divine sonship. The words of John the evangelist clearly refer to an awareness of the chosen people and the establishment of a relationship with the God of the covenant, the God of history. In other words, we stand before the people's experience of God as compassionate and faithful, as desiring to save his chosen ones and lead them to the fullness of life... and thus lead all humankind to the same fullness of life. Certainly the words that John utilizes are a clear example of the inculturation of the classical words of the Hebrew tradition into the Hellenistic world.

The Letter to the Hebrews presents the two natures of Christ in a somewhat unusual way. After a series of references to the Old Testament (especially to the Book of Psalms) that highlight the superiority of the Son in relationship to the angels, the author comes to the fol-

lowing conclusion-exhortation: *"We must attend all the more to what we have heard, so that we may not be carried away"* (Hebrews 2:1). Obviously this is a reference to the gospel of Christ which was mentioned at the beginning of the letter but there, other words were utilized. If the law, which according to common practice, was proclaimed through the angels and sanctioned in like manner those who transgressed said law², how much more will disobedience of the new law of mercy and fidelity given by Jesus Christ... how much more will such transgressions be sanctioned. The law was given to the people through the mediation of Moses; grace and truth have been passed on to us through Jesus Christ. St. Paul, after a thorough analysis of the realities of the law and grace, comes to the following conclusion: have no other debt with anyone except that of mutual love; charity is the fullness of the law (Rom. 13:10; cf., Lk 10:28,37; I Cor. 13:13).

There are two passages in the letter that are clear references to Christ's humanity. They are a synthesis, a summary of everything that had previously been stated concerning this matter; they are clearly referring to the reality of the Incarnation. The letter affirms: *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help"* (Hebrews 4:15-16). The same idea was expressed even before presenting Jesus Christ as the faithful and compassionate high priest: *"He had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested"* (Heb. 2:17-18).

The reflection of John Paul II in *Dives in Misericordia* follows the same line of thought when he affirms:

"In this way, in Christ and through Christ, God also becomes especially visible in his mercy; that is to say, there is emphasized that attribute of the divinity which the Old Testament, using various concepts and terms, already defined as mercy" (*Dives in Misericordia*, #2).

Christ confers a definitive meaning on the whole tradition of divine mercy. Christ not only speaks about mercy and explains it through examples and parables, but even more Christ himself incarnates and personifies mercy. He, himself is mercy. To the person who sees mercy in him and finds it in him, God becomes visible in a particular way as the Father who is rich in mercy.

² Cf., Deuteronomy, chapter 28: the blessings that are given to those who observe the law and the curses that will befall those who do not listen to the Lord's voice. See also, Joshua 24:25ff. and Matthew 7:21-27, the conclusion to the sermon on the Mount.

As a conclusion to this first part I want to highlight the reality of the Incarnation and the profession of faith in the Trinity. The convocation of this Year of Faith explicitly mentions this need: to profess our faith in the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the letter to the Hebrews the narration of the Incarnation is so profound that it can only be compared with the hymn that Paul takes from the tradition of the primitive church in order to exhort the members of the Christian community to clothe themselves in the same sentiments as Christ and to remain faithful to their service and the practice of charity.

The brief passage, which concludes the first five chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews, is like a true profession of faith in the whole mystery of Christ. In four strokes the most outstanding characteristics of his identity are described: the prayers and supplications that Christ offered with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death is a clear reference to Jesus' passion and death, a reference to the priestly prayer that John places at the conclusion of the farewell discourses. Three times this passage refers to the condition of the Son. The perfection of the Son's obedience, even when confronted with the reality of martyrdom, becomes the cause of salvation for all those who obey him.

3. Jesus Christ, the high priest of the heavenly realities

The second part of my reflection will focus on three fundamental themes related to Christ's priesthood: the superiority of its worship, its sanctuary and its mediation. One will not find many references to all of this in the papal document even though this is the primary argument of the letter as stated by the author on various occasions. Nevertheless when speaking about the person of Christ I believe it is important to recall the content of this central part of the letter in order to come to some practical conclusions in two vital aspects of the life of believers: the area of worship and the area of witness.

Jesus Christ was a descendant of David and consequently he was not a member of the priestly family. The author has found in the person of Melchizedek the best possible way to explain the newness and the greatness of Christ's priesthood. The very etymology of the name (Melchizedek equals 'king of justice') and the city where Melchizedek exercised his ministry (Salem equals 'place of peace') help us understand the explanation and the argument before us.

If Abraham gave to Melchizedek a tenth of his spoils after he had defeated the kings, and if, therefore, Melchizedek blessed Abraham, it means that Abraham recognized the dignity and the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over that of the Levitical priesthood. Indeed, the Levitical priesthood was familiar to Abraham since the twelve tribes of Israel came into existence from his descendants. This powerful

symbolism and typology are further enriched with the image of the risen one: *"Without father or mother or ancestry, without beginning of days or end of life, thus made to resemble the Son of God, he remains a priest forever"* (Heb. 7:3).

In light of this extensive argumentation, I want to highlight three affirmations that are also three great proclamations of faith with regard to the priesthood of Christ. Beginning with this comparison between the Levitical priesthood and the priesthood according to Melchizedek there are some very clear differences and we also become aware of the superiority and the excellence of Christ's priesthood in three or four concrete and essential aspects.

The first contrast/difference is found in the person and the person's condition: Christ, the heavenly high priest, is holy; in him there are no defects or weaknesses like those that other high priests; raised up to the heavens, Christ no longer needs to offer sacrifice for his sins or for the sins of the people. Jesus did this once and for all when he offered himself on the cross. Thus, the superiority of Christ's priesthood is revealed: the law established the office of the high priest, an office conferred on fragile human beings but the words of the covenant, prior to the law, made the Son perfect for all times: *you are my son, this day I have begotten you* (cf., Heb. 5:15; 7:1-3).

The second contrast/difference refers to the temple. Once a year the high priest entered the Holy of Holies where he poured blood on the mercy seat in expiation for sins. The Temple had been made by human hands which followed the plan that had been shown to Moses. The temple which Jesus entered once and for all was not of human construction or of this world. In the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist the Christian community expresses its faith with the following words: *on the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and is seated the right hand of God the Father almighty*. The book of Acts provides us with a graphic description of this decisive and transcendental event.

The third contrast/difference refers to the efficacy of the sacrifice. What the rite of expiation was unable to achieve in the sanctuary of the Old Testament was fully accomplished by the death of Christ. The letter uses various expressions to emphasize this idea: *"Being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him"* (Hebrews 5:9). Christ has achieved an eternal and universal redemption, a true liberation. Christ, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself blamelessly to God and cleansed our conscience of dead works in order that we might worship the living God.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, in the second volume of his work, *Jesus of Nazareth*, comments on some of these references and actions. He states that the Gospel of John (especially the theology of the priestly prayer) and the Letter to the Hebrews (especially its interpretation of

cultic law from the perspective of the theology of the cross) have developed these thoughts and have shown that the profound meaning of the Old Testament is revealed on the cross (this not only follows the thought of the prophets who criticized many different cultic practices but states in a more positive manner the significance and the intention of worship).

4. The celebration of the Year of Faith

After reflecting on the person of Christ who is *the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith*, I will comment on the distinct proposals of the papal document while at the same time referring to the Letter to the Hebrews. I would say that the two points that are developed in this second part of the reflection are the following: first, what is faith and second, during the Year of Faith what concrete dynamics should be developed in the life of believers.

The authors of the Letter to the Hebrews gives us a description of faith: "*The realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1). It is true that various words are chosen to translate the two key words in this description. The words utilized in distinct translations speak of substance, guarantee, foundation, continuity in the things hoped for; explanation, demonstration as proof of the things that are not seen. Here faith is viewed more as a practical aspect rather than something that is speculative, that is, faith is viewed as attitudes that inspire and as works that are developed and give witness.

The passage from the letter to the Corinthians can shed much light on this matter (cf., I Cor. 13 ff.). There the theological virtue is described in great detail, in a very dynamic way and with its many manifestations in the life of the believer. The three affirmations at the beginning of that passage highlight the primacy of love: "*If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal; if I do not have love, I am nothing; if I do not have love, I gain nothing*" (I Cor. 13:1-3).

Paul speaks about love in the context of the charisms and does so by referring to the unity in diversity. There is a diversity of charisms, a diversity of gifts, and a diversity of ministries, but there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit who produces all of them in everyone. Love, as the most excellent way, leads people to true life: "*I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them*" (Jn. 17:26). This is the conclusion to Jesus' priestly prayer and in fact, this is an all-encompassing and coherent summary of the most vibrant teaching of John's gospel.

The Apostolic Letter, *Porta Fidei*, highlights this same idea in the following manner:

"It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize... Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord's invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples" (Porta Fidei, #7).

5. How to celebrate the Year of Faith

The letter to the Hebrews, after describing faith in the words that we previously cited, praises the great witnesses of faith throughout the history of salvation. In this context the patriarchs are the first ones to be mentioned. Perhaps the person who is most spoken about is Abraham, father of the offspring of the chosen people. There is a hymn to Abraham's faith: *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise" (Heb. 11:8-9).* The same expression, that is, the words *by faith*, are repeated as an introductory refrain to each of the paragraphs that follow, and then are concluded with: *"Yet all these, though approved because of their faith, did not receive what had been promised. God had foreseen something better for us, so that without us they should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40).*

All these witnesses of faith in the Old Testament were less fortunate than we... in fact Jesus reminds us about this reality when he says: *"Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it" (Mt. 13:16-17).* John explains all of this in numerous references, for example, when speaking about the signs that Jesus revealed and when referring to Jesus' dialogue with his disciples or his debates with his adversaries: *"Amen, amen, I say to you whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life" (Jn. 5:25).* *"It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn. 6:23).* *"My teaching is not my own but is from the one who sent me. Whoever chooses to do his will shall know whether I speak on my own" (Jn. 7:16-17).* *"I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father" (Jn. 14:6-7).*

Once again we highlight the initial idea of this reflection on the person and the message of Jesus Christ. The God that Jesus Christ reveals to humankind is not an abstract God of philosophy: the God

of order, beauty and creativity (even though God could be perfectly reconciled with this objective vision of reality). The God that Jesus Christ reveals is the God of creation and history, the God who is one and three, the God of revelation, the God of the Word and the God who is in constant dialogue with humanity and with each individual person, the God who is in dialogue with the gospel of Christ, the God who is present among us through the infusion and the permanent recreation of the Spirit.

After presenting the most exemplary witnesses of the first era of salvation history, the author of the letter to the Hebrews, as if dealing with irrefutable evidence at the end of some catechetical lesson, makes the following unique and conclusive affirmation in Hebrews 12:1-4:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith... fixed on him who endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lost heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood".

6. The work of faith

I would like to begin this section with a profound testimony from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians... a testimony that refers to the vitality of that community. Paul greets the members of the local church, the members of the new people of God, with words filled with enthusiasm and joy. He had great reason to feel as he did and some of those reasons he specifically mentions. I want to refer to two of those reasons which, from the perspective of the exhortation in the letter to the Hebrews (an exhortation referred to in the previous paragraph), place before us a series of options, practices and alternatives (which are both Christian and complimentary) that can be applied to the personal as well as the community and social dimensions of the faith.

With this we are not suggesting anything about the material author of the Letter to the Hebrews, but it is obvious that both the author of the letter to the Hebrews and the authors of the letter to the Thessalonians share a certain affinity in many aspects. When writing to the Thessalonians, Paul is especially grateful for their *work of faith*. He states: *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord, receiving the word in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit... for from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth... in every place your faith in God has shown forth... may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all"* (I Thess. 1:3-6; 3:12).

With mind and heart attentive to the final exhortation in the Letter to the Hebrews, aware of the encouragement and the example of so

many witnesses to the faith, witnesses from the past and present day witnesses, and finally gazing on the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith, let us then look at some concrete and specific areas with the corresponding actions that are referred to in *Porta Fidei* when speaking about the Year of Faith.

6.1. The word of life

I will limit myself to comment on three aspects. The first aspect deals with the word. When Paul VI proclaimed a year of faith in 1967, he thought of it as a solemn moment for the whole Church to make *an authentic and sincere profession of the same faith* (*Porta Fidei*, #4). Benedict XVI's invitation is also clear and very demanding:

"We want this Year to arouse in every believer the aspiration to profess the faith in fullness and with renewed conviction, with confidence and hope... 'Man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved' (Rom 10:10). The heart indicates that the first act by which one comes to faith is God's gift and the action of grace which acts and transforms the person deep within" (Porta Fidei, #9, 10).

Those lines of thought are often repeated in revelation and in the Church's magisterium. In order not to be tedious with regard to the Church's teaching, I simply want to highlight one event that has profound doctrinal and pedagogical significance. I refer to the theme of the last two Synods of Bishops: the Word of God in the life and the mission of the Church (October 5-26, 2008) and the New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith (October 7-28, 2012). Among other things there is an attempt to discover the truth and the beauty and the joy of the faith, an attempt to experience in some way a personal and community encounter with Christ and his gospel, an attempt to become familiar with the Word of God in order to discover its formative and transformative ability, its new and broad horizons that have been revealed to us. The apostolic exhortation, *Verbum Domini*, states:

"Every man and woman appears as someone to whom the word speaks, challenges and calls to enter this dialogue of love through a free response. Each of us is thus enabled by God to hear and respond to his word. We were created in the word and we live in the word; we cannot understand ourselves unless we are open to this dialogue. The word of God discloses the filial and relational nature of human existence. We are indeed called by grace to be conformed to Christ, Son of the Father, and, in him, to be transformed" (Verbum Domini, #22).

This first area implies that there is a whole world to be discovered. The Word that, in light of the mystery of Christ, is revealed and meditated upon and pondered in prayer... that Word clearly shows the authentic nature and value of created things and their relationship to transcendent and spiritual things. A true understanding of the legitimate autonomy of created things should never be cause to deny the value of that relationship. All of this has positive repercussions on men and women and their full development.

The gospel is rich in its teaching with regard to this area and enables people to act justly and live in solidarity with all people. If the human person is the supreme work of creation, then all other created things should converge toward the person so that they can fully realize their vocation in this world and become prophets of the new world in Christ. John Paul II referred to this reality when he convoked the Jubilee Year of 2000:

"The Incarnation of the Son of God and the salvation which he has accomplished by his Death and Resurrection are therefore the true criterion for evaluating all that happens in time and every effort to make life more human" (Incarnationis Mysterium, #1).

6.2. Reconciliation

I sincerely believe that this second area is a logical consequence of the previous one. One of the most encouraging and beautiful expressions is the affirmation that we find in the letter to the Ephesians: *"Jesus Christ is our peace"* (Eph. 2:14 ff.). Christ has torn down the wall that separates us in order to create in himself one new person, thus establishing peace and reconciling both in one body. The Word of God constantly exhorts us to celebrate and live the reality of reconciliation. In Semitic culture and thought peace is the fullness of all blessings... peace fills and satisfies the human heart, that is, it creates internal beauty and order and also creates external and social order which are the fruits of justice.

The gospel proclaims that those who work for the cause of peace are blessed. The idea of reconciliation and peace not only reminds us of the many prayers, parables and exhortations that are found in Scripture (cf., Lk. 15:11 ff.; Jn. 3:16 ff.; II Cor. 5:19-20; Ps. 85:11) but also points us toward the Social Doctrine of the Church where we find a vast and complete development of this doctrine that is being constantly renewed. Indeed, the social doctrine of the Church together with the gospel from which it receives its primary inspiration and also together with its analysis of the reality and its attentiveness to the signs of the times and the hopes and the desires of men and women in every historical era... in this way the Social Doctrine of the Church can and ought to be constituted as a valid instrument of evangelization. Are not

these the legitimate aspirations of men and women and people throughout the world, especially those who are poor and afflicted in any way... are not these signs that question the Church of our era?

Therefore the reconciliation that is spoken about here encompasses every dimension of the human person and the many and varied situations in the midst of the which men and women constantly act, for example, family situations, professional situations, social situations, etc. In other words, we must be mindful of Paul's invitation: in the name of Christ we beg you to become reconciled with God (this reconciliation must involve reconciliation with our brothers and sisters, with society and with all of creation). I do not believe that we are dealing with some fantasy; indeed the fact that this invitation has been repeated so often by the recent teaching of the Church as it exhorts people to become aware of the social question and the problems of the world, leaves no doubt about the reality and the urgency of this. This same urgency is made clear in the new situations and challenges that are pointed out in the *Lineamenta* for the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization: secularization, emigration and immigration, economic inequality, scientific and technical research, etc.

6.3. Charity

Both *Porta Fidei*, as well as the letter to the Hebrews, emphasize the need to be faithful to the practice of the charity. We cite here the words of Benedict XVI:

"The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity. Saint Paul 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, in such a way that each allows the other to set out along its respective path. 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'. Supported by faith, let us look with hope at our commitment in the world, as we await 'new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells'" (Porta Fidel, #14).

In the letter to the Hebrews we read: *"Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have; God is pleased by sacrifices of that kind"* (Heb.12:14; 13:1-16). For us, as Vincentians, this dimension or aspect of the celebration of the Year of Faith can only be achieved through a stronger and more effective commitment to the cause of the poor. Today we are aware of the demands of charity as they apply to our specific charism: to search out the causes of poverty and to do this courageously and intelligently and with humil-

ity and to offer specific, effective and applicable solutions. As we do this let us work effectively on behalf of the poor and for the credibility of the gospel and the Church.

7. Conclusion

The last proposal for the celebration of the Year of Faith has no time frame for its accomplishment. Indeed, it is one thing to speak about reflection and other activities and celebrations that should be done throughout this time and quite another thing to speak about the fruits that all of this should produce. Here we are not talking about some transitory and passing fruit, but rather we are referring to a personal and collective effort that will help us to be what we are called to be as Christians. As Benedict XVI tells us at the end of his letter:

"May this Year of Faith make our relationship with Christ the Lord increasingly firm, since only in him is there the certitude for looking to the future and the guarantee of an authentic and lasting love" (Porta Fidei, #15).