

Opening of the Year of Faith

Stewardship Award Presentation

Holy Rosary Cathedral

7 October 2012

Dear brother priests, consecrated men and women, seminarians, candidates for the permanent diaconate, dear friends in Christ, and especially dear recipients of an Archdiocesan Stewardship Award:

Introduction

Gaudet Mater Ecclesia: “Mother Church rejoices.”¹ With these words, on October 11th 1962, Blessed John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council, that “great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century.”² Now, fifty years later, on this glorious feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, under whose protection and guidance our Archdiocese is placed, we once again rejoice, for we are opening the Year of Faith in our local Church. Now, for us, is the “favourable time” (cf. 2 Cor 6:2) to entrust ourselves more completely to the God who loved us to the very end (cf. Jn 13:1) in Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for our salvation.

¹ Blessed John XXIII, Address at the Opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (11 October 1962).

² Blessed John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57.

But why this Year of Faith? And why now? On the one hand, it commemorates the golden jubilee of the beginning of Vatican II and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* – both of which have been inestimable graces for the People of God. Yet, on the other hand, the Holy Father also has something else in mind. As we know, in our families and communities the gift of faith given at Baptism “risks being extinguished, like a flame that is no longer fed. We are facing a profound crisis of faith, a loss of the religious sense that constitutes the greatest challenge to the Church today.”³

How does Pope Benedict propose to meet this challenge? Listen to his words:

Precisely in order to give a fresh impetus to the mission of the whole Church to lead human beings out of the wilderness in which they often find themselves to the place of life, friendship with Christ that gives us life in fullness, I have decided to proclaim a “Year of Faith” . . . It will be a moment of grace and commitment for an ever fuller conversion to God, to strengthen our faith in him and to proclaim him with joy to the people of our time.⁴

³ Benedict XVI, Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (27 January 2012).

⁴ Benedict XVI, Homily (16 October 2011).

This Year now beginning is summoning each of us to a renewed conversion to Christ and to a deeper friendship with him, the one Saviour of the world. This Year of Faith, then, is giving us, together with the whole Church, the opportunity to “recall the beauty and centrality of the faith, . . . and to reinforce it and to deepen it at the personal and the community level.”⁵ We shall strengthen our own sometimes feeble faith by witnessing to it more courageously and sharing it more generously with others.

Gospel: Mary, Model of Faith

When we turn to today’s Gospel, so fitting for our opening of the Year of Faith, Mary has just arrived at Elizabeth’s house. The interior light of the Holy Spirit enfolds their meeting. And Elizabeth exclaims with words we repeat daily in the Hail Mary: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? . . . And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Lk 1:42-43,45).

⁵ Benedict XVI, Angelus (16 October 2011).

Why is Mary blessed? Because she saw the work of God in the history of her people and in her own life with the eyes of faith. She is blessed, because she believed. Not long before, at Nazareth, by faith, she had accepted the Word of the Lord and conceived the Incarnate Word.⁶ Hence, “Mary is the ‘believer’ par excellence, the pure and perfect disciple.”⁷

She believed. She trusted. The young teenage girl had been asked to do something for which she was unprepared. She had no idea as a child that God had this in store for her. She was engaged to her boyfriend, Joseph, and no doubt expected to live an ordinary village life in the small hamlet of Nazareth, a village of no more than 400 residents in a remote part of Israel.

But God intervened. He called her to do the unexpected. She was called to play an essential role in the greatest drama ever conceived: God’s plan to give “his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

Surely she was caught unaware, surprised by God. Think about it. Mary was not given the future scenario which would unfold: becoming a refugee with an infant to carry him to Egypt; losing him in the temple

⁶ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address (31 May 2008).

⁷ Benedict XVI, General Audience (15 February 2006).

at twelve; hearing her son declared a madman by her fellow Nazarenes; seeing him abandoned by his friends and finally crucified by his enemies.

God gave her no vision into her future. Nor does he us. He asked only this: “Trust me.” And she did.

During this Year of Faith, we could do no better than to take Mary as our teacher of faith, as the one who models for us what it is like to believe – to entrust ourselves to God. As lived by Mary, faith is a total, obedient, trusting, self-surrender of the mind and body to the Lord: “she entrusted herself to God without reserve.”⁸

We, too, are asked to believe. We, too, must trust that “what God has promised [me] will be fulfilled, will be realized.” What has he promised? That he will always be with us; that we need not ever fear being abandoned or outside of God’s mercy.

Like Mary, we have no other scenario for our lives, of what will happen to us, to our children, to our families, to our own lives than this: because the Son of God entered the world, he will never leave it “alone,” never forsake it or us. In Christ, God wears our flesh and will never abandon us; he is always be there for us, no matter how absent he seems, how distant. He is with us, as he promised, “always, to the end of the

⁸ Blessed John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 13.

age” (Mt 28:20).

New Evangelization: Catholics Come Home©

Today, in Rome, the Church marks yet another significant event in the life of the Church. For the next three weeks, a representative group of Bishops, accompanied by consecrated men and women and lay faithful, will be meeting in a Synod, a gathering called by the Holy Father to discuss the timely topic of “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”

This Synod coincides with the opening of the Year of Faith and has set the agenda for one of the ways in which the Archdiocese of Vancouver will unite itself with the Universal Church during the coming year. As the Holy Father repeated again just this morning, “The Church exists in order to evangelize. Faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ’s command, his disciples went out to the whole world to announce the Good News, spreading Christian communities everywhere.”⁹

Again and again we have seen that in various periods of history, the Lord has given a renewed dynamism in Church’s evangelizing activity. In our own time and place, right here in our Archdiocese, I believe that the Holy Spirit is nurturing a new effort to announce the Good News here in our Archdiocese. For us in British Columbia, “the

⁹ Benedict XVI, Homily for the Opening of the Synod (7 October 2012).

new evangelization is directed principally at those who, though baptized, have drifted away from the Church and live without reference to the Christian life.”¹⁰

Our task is once again to open wide the door of faith for members of our families and communities who have wandered away from the practice of the faith into which they were baptized.

By the joyful witness of your life in Christ, your welcoming attitude and your kindly invitation, you stand at the door. You are there, helping them to see again the beauty of living life to the full (cf. Jn 10:10); of rediscovering a taste for the word of God in the busyness of their lives and a desire for the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist, the very Bread of life, where the Lord himself is waiting for them.

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily for the Opening of the Synod (7 October 2012).

Our Catholics Come Home© initiative, of which you have heard and will continue to hear much in the months again, is a special focus of the new evangelization of the Archdiocese. It is aimed at helping those who have, for so many different reasons, become tepid to encounter the Lord in friendship once again, he who alone fills our existence with meaning and peace. Your mission is stand beside them, inviting them to open again that door which leads to faith, “that source of grace which brings joy and hope to personal, family and social life.”¹¹ As you stand there at the door, waiting and praying, keep remembering the wonderful words of Pope Benedict: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know him and to speak to others of our friendship with him.”¹²

Stewardship Awards

My last remarks this afternoon – but by no means the least important! – are directed to yet another reason for today’s celebration: the acknowledgment of those 27 men and women from throughout the Archdiocese whose lives of gratitude and faithful service of the Church deserve recognition. They are certainly not alone in meriting this

¹¹ Benedict XVI, Homily for the Opening of the Synod (7 October 2012).

¹² Benedict XVI, Homily at Inaugural Mass of Pontificate (15 April 2005).

honour. They represent the thousands of faithful stewards who day in and day out, year after year, give of themselves by sharing their time, talent and treasure for the Church in the world.

If we look again to the Gospel, we see Mary, a young woman recently pregnant, undertake a journey to her older cousin Elizabeth. What led her to forget herself, to spend the first three months of her pregnancy at the service of her cousin in need of help? It was the Holy Spirit who had come upon her at the Annunciation who likewise impelled her to “set out” and depart without hesitation (cf. Lk 1:39) in order to help her aged relative, putting aside her own legitimate needs, difficulties and worries. Mary was “stewarding” God’s greatest Gift in her womb, Jesus. But she was guided by a faith that comes alive through charity (cf. Gal 5:6).¹³

Likewise our recipients of the Stewardship Award have given life to their faith by acts of love – sometimes heroic but more often humble in the eyes of the world, but great in God’s sight. “Those who love forget about themselves and place themselves at the service of their neighbour.”¹⁴ Lives of stewardship are rooted in gratitude, the conviction that the Apostle Paul proposes in our Second Reading: “God

¹³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Address (31 May 2007).

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, Homily to New Cardinals (25 March 2006).

chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph 1:4). Those who know that they have been chosen respond with thanksgiving and with Mary they can sing, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour” (Lk 1:46-47).

Conclusion

Gaudet Mater Ecclesia: “Mother Church rejoices.”¹⁵ The Church in Vancouver rejoices and, on this Thanksgiving weekend, gives thanks to the Lord for the graces bestowed upon us: above all the gift of our faith and our mission to share the deepest joy, that of knowing God in Christ.”¹⁶

As we begin the Year of Faith, let us place ourselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary. With her let us invoke a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit, that he may illumine our minds and embolden our wills to make this Year fruitful for ourselves, our families, our parishes and the whole Church. Amen.

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¹⁵ Blessed John XXIII, Address at the Opening of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (11 October 1962).

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, Homily (18 December 2005).

