

A Three-Part Study Guide for
Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”
Apostolic Letter of Pope Benedict XVI
announcing the “Year of Faith”
October 11, 2012 – November 24, 2013

“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 (See Romans 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 (See John 17:22)” (*Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”*, n. 1).

Note: In this study document, only key points are drawn from the text of *Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”* which are then followed by discussion questions, allowing groups in the parish to focus on the context and the purpose of this important year.

Session 1: Rediscovering the Journey of Faith

(*Porta Fidei*, Paragraphs 1 -5)

(Session 1 - 40 minutes)

Opening Prayer: Come Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love, send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. Let us pray. O God, by the light of the Holy Spirit You did instruct the hearts and minds of Your faithful. Grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolation through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Read Aloud and Reflect:

“The ‘Year of Faith’ begins on October 11, 2012 and ends on the feast of Christ the King on November 24th 2013.” Pope Benedict XVI declared the upcoming Year of Faith because 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.... 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...because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected so many people”
(*Porta Fidei – The Door of Faith*, paragraph n. 2).

1. Why does Pope Benedict XVI begin the Apostolic Letter by saying that we need to rediscover the journey of faith?
2. Why did Pope Benedict XVI call for a “Year of Faith” at this time?

“The people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in Him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (See John 4:14). We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (See John 6:51). Indeed, the teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power.... The question posed by his listeners is the same that we ask today: ‘What must we do...?’ (John 6:28). We know Jesus’ reply: ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent’ (John 6:29). Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation” (*Porta Fidei*, n. 3).

3. It is important that we understand what faith is:
Faith is both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed. —*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

How is faith personal? In other words, who are the two persons involved in making an act of faith?

4. Why is faith so important?

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The Door of Faith*, n 4)

In the light of all this, [Pope Benedict XVI has] decided to announce a Year of Faith. It will begin on 11 October 2012, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and it will end on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, on 24 November 2013.

With the Year of Faith corresponding to the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict XVI writes:

- The texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and significant.
- The Council was “the great grace bestowed on the Church in the twentieth century” and is a “sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.”
- If we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church.

(A right hermeneutic refers to interpreting the documents of Vatican II in continuity with the Church’s rich two-thousand years of teaching and Tradition handed on to us by the bishops as successors of the Apostles.)

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Church during the 20th Century came to reflect more deeply on certain aspects of Her own identity and, consequently, how She could meet the needs of the changing modern world. With this end in mind the Second Vatican Council thus emphasized these particular aspects of the Church’s identity: who She is in Herself and how She acts in the world. In Herself, that is, *interiorly*, the Church is not simply a human institution, but as the Mystical Body of Christ and the People of God, She is a “light to the nations”. Regarding the Church’s actions *exteriorly*, the Council expressed in the documents that the Church needs to be more effective in Her role in today’s world as “This openness was an evangelical response to recent changes in the world, including the profoundly disturbing experiences of the Twentieth Century, a century scarred by the First and Second World Wars, by the experience of concentration camps and by horrendous massacres. All these events demonstrate most vividly that the world needs purification; it needs to be converted.” (Blessed John Paul II, *On the Coming of the Third Millennium - Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, n. 18). In other words, in re-examining Her relationship to the world, the Church was gathering the signs of the times – scrutinizing the culture, religious practices or lack of, and tumultuous circumstances of the twentieth century– in order to help pastors and the laity know how to teach the Catholic faith in a way that was relevant for people today.

While the Church expresses Herself with a new emphasis, She is not a new or different Church. “The Second Vatican Council is often considered as the beginning of a new era in the

life of the Church. This is true, but at the same time it is difficult to overlook the fact that *the Council drew much from the experiences and reflections of the immediate past*, especially from the intellectual legacy left by Pius XII. In the history of the Church, the 'old' and the 'new' are always closely interwoven. The 'new' grows out of the 'old', and the 'old' finds a fuller expression in the 'new'" (Blessed John Paul II, On the Coming of the Third Millennium - Tertio Millenio Adveniente, no. 19).

An illustration of the traditional teaching being taught in a way appropriate for the modern person can be seen in the following example. The sexual revolution exploded in the late 60's. There was a rejection of the established principles of purity, chastity, and modesty, which probably resulted from a lack of proper understanding of the dignity of the human person, human sexuality, our wounded nature due to the effects of original sin, and the beautiful way that God designed us. The perennial teachings of the Church contain the truth about these matters. However, as a result of his participating in the Second Vatican Council, and his priestly service to young people, Blessed John Paul II "repackaged" the riches of Church teaching and gave us the Theology of the Body.

Further, in examining her identity interiorly and exteriorly, the Council also stressed the importance of the laity. In one of the Council documents, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), a good portion is dedicated to the place and role of the laity. The laity are an essential part of the Church along with the ordained clergy (pope, bishops, priests, deacons) and religious. In looking at images of what the Church is in Herself *interiorly*, particularly the laity, the document states: "These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God.... Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism'; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity....For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus" (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 31, 32).

In this call to holiness of all people, the Holy Eucharist is the primary source for strengthening people *interiorly*, in their relationship with Jesus Christ and living out the Catholic Faith. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) calls the laity to active participation: "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people' (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their Baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit..." (14).

This active participation is both internal and external, soul and body. The external responses and singing, as well as gestures, actions and bodily attitudes are to assist the mind *interiorly* in pondering the proclaimed word of God and lifting up one's heart to pray with and in the prayers of the Mass. This participation is most perfectly expressed when we receive the Lord Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and listen and speak with Him in our heart.

Continuing their actions *exteriorly*, because of their place in the Church as the People of God, the laity are called to act in the world. *Lumen Gentium* states that we need to “play [our] part in carrying out the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world....[E]ven when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world.... [I]t remains for each one of them to cooperate in the external spread and the dynamic growth of the Kingdom of Christ in the world. Therefore, let the laity devotedly strive to acquire a more profound grasp of revealed truth, and let them insistently beg of God the gift of wisdom” (*Lumen Gentium* n. 35).

“...[T]he laity, whoever they are, are called upon, as living members, to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification, since this very energy is a gift of the Creator and a blessing of the Redeemer. The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. Through their Baptism and Confirmation all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. Moreover, by the Sacraments, especially Holy Eucharist, that charity toward God and man which is the soul of the apostolate is communicated and nourished. Now the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. Thus every layman, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself ‘according to the measure of Christ’s bestowal’” (*Lumen Gentium* 33).

For reference, the key documents of Vatican Council II are:

- The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*)
- The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium – A Light to the Nations*)
- The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum – The Word of God*)
- The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes – The Role of the Church in the Modern World*)

Note: The Vatican Council documents also includes 12 other Decrees and Declarations.

5. Discuss the significance of the Second Vatican Council being referred to as a “sure compass by which to take our bearings” (PF, 5). How can reading, studying, interpreting correctly, and implementing the documents of Vatican II be a cause for renewal?

Regarding the Year of Faith, “... the starting date of 11 October 2012 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, a text promulgated by my Predecessor, Blessed John Paul II, with a view to illustrating for all the faithful the power and beauty of the faith” (*Porta Fidei*, 4).

6. Why was the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church essential for our time? What is the power and beauty of the faith?

Personal Response:

How will you personally respond to the call by Pope Benedict XVI to “rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of your encounter with Christ”?

Closing Prayer:

The Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; I believe that Your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because You have revealed them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Amen.

Session 2: Deepening Our Faith

(*Porta Fidei*, Paragraphs 6 – 10)

(Session 2 - 30 minutes)

Opening Prayer:

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; I believe that Your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because You have revealed them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Amen.

Read Aloud and Reflect

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – the “Door of Faith”*, n. 6)

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.

- The Church... holy and always in need of purification follows constantly the path of penance and renewal.
- Christ saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:31).
- By the power of the risen Lord the Church is given strength to overcome its sorrow and its difficulties so that it may reveal in the world, faithfully, Christ Jesus.
- The Year of Faith is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord.
- Through faith, this new 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.

1. Briefly relate an experience in which you have grown in your faith.
2. What commitment will you make to deepen your faith during the Year of Faith? What is the result when your faith is not growing through ongoing study and formation?

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”*, n. 7)

It is the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelize.

- Jesus sends us to proclaim his Gospel to all the peoples of the earth (See Mt 28:19).
 - Today, there is a need for a new evangelization in order to rediscover the joy of believing and the enthusiasm for communicating the faith.
 - Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. 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.
 - The importance of believing and the riches of the truth of the faith help people to find the right path towards the ‘door of faith’
3. Read aloud Matthew 28:18-19. The term the New Evangelization was coined by Blessed John Paul II and means to bring the “Good News” to all people with new ardor, new methods, and new language. The “Good News” is that God created us to be united with Him in a relationship of love; we were separated from God through the Original Sin; however, God the Father sent His Son to offer His life for us through His passion, death and Resurrection by which Jesus opened Heaven for us and reunited us with the Father. This “Good News” must be passed on. How do the parish and Catholic school participate in the New Evangelization? How can this effort be more intentional during the Year of Faith – “to help people find the right path towards the ‘door of faith’”?

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”*, n. 8-9)

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” to the love of our Heavenly Father.

- During this time of spiritual grace that the Lord offers us, we want to celebrate this Year in a worthy and fruitful manner by recalling the precious gift of faith.
- Reflection on the faith will have to be intensified, so as to help all believers in Christ to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing. We will have the opportunity to profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our Cathedrals and in the Churches of the whole world; in our homes and among our families, so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations the faith of all times.
- Parish communities are to find a way, during this Year of Faith, to make a public profession of the Credo [that is, the Creed].
- 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.

- The believers' witness of life will need to grow in credibility. To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year.
 - Christians in the early centuries were required to learn the creed from memory. It served them as a daily prayer not to forget the commitment they had undertaken in Baptism. Saint Augustine speaks of the handing over of the creed, ...the words on which the faith of Mother Church is firmly built above the stable foundation that is Christ the Lord. You have received it and recited it, but in your minds and hearts you must keep it ever present, you must repeat it in your beds, recall it in the public squares and not forget it during meals: even when your body is asleep, you must watch over it with your hearts.
4. What is the point of the Year of Faith?
 5. How will the parish community and school make a public profession of the Credo?

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”*, n. 10)

There exists a profound unity between

- a) the act by which we believe – entrusting ourselves fully to God, in complete freedom. ...[T]he 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.
- b) the content of the faith to which we give our assent – the teachings of the Church as found in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.'

Saint Luke teaches that knowing the content to be believed is not sufficient unless the heart, the authentic sacred space within the person, is opened by grace that allows the eyes to see below the surface and to understand that what has been proclaimed is the word of God” – the Person of Jesus Christ.

Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. This 'standing with Him' points towards an understanding of the reasons for believing. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes. The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one's faith fearlessly to every person. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit t, that makes us fit for mission and strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous.

Evidently, knowledge of the content of faith is essential for giving one's own assent, that is to say for adhering fully with intellect and will to what the Church proposes. Knowledge of faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God. The giving of assent implies that, when we believe, we freely accept the whole mystery of faith, because the guarantor of its truth is God who reveals himself and allows us to know his mystery of love. ...Very many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are nevertheless sincerely searching for the ultimate meaning and definitive truth of their lives and of the world. This search is an authentic 'preamble' to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God. [This desire for God is] written into the human heart, to set out to find the One whom we would not be seeking had He not already set out to meet us. To this encounter, faith invites us and it opens us in fullness.

6. Continuing to grow in our understanding of the (inexhaustible) content of the Faith helps us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ because the content of the Faith is about Him, and indeed is Him. How does this growing in our knowledge of the content of the Faith naturally flow from our head to the heart, so that we encounter Christ at an authentically intimate level, truly coming to know and love Him as a real Person?

Personal Response:

7. How might the Lord be calling you personally to grow in your relationship with Him during the "Year of Faith"?
8. How is the Lord calling the parish and school to grow as a community in their relationship with Him during the "Year of Faith"?

Closing Pray:

Pray the Nicene Creed. Lift up in prayer all Catholics, that they may have the relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ which naturally fosters the desire and courage to be witnesses to their faith in Him and all He has revealed in His Church, and for our brothers and sisters who have left the Catholic Church, that their hearts may be moved to return Home.

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made,
consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow up to and including and became man, all bow.)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Session 3: Encountering Jesus Christ, the “pioneer and perfector of our faith”

(*Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”*, Paragraphs 6 – 10)

(Session 3 - 30 minutes for discussion with an additional 15 minutes to complete the simple tour of the *Catechism* in question 1.)

Opening Prayer:

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three divine Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; I believe that Your divine Son became man and died for our sins, and that He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because You have revealed them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Amen.

Read Aloud and Respond:

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – the “Door of Faith”*, n. 11-12)

On page after page [of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*], we find that what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church

- In order to arrive at a systematic knowledge of the content of the faith, all can find in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* a precious and indispensable tool.
- Blessed John Paul II wrote: “this catechism will make a very important contribution to that work of renewing the whole life of the Church ... I declare it to be a valid and legitimate instrument for ecclesial communion and a sure norm for teaching the faith.”
- It is in this sense that that the Year of Faith will have to see a concerted effort to rediscover and study the fundamental content of the faith that receives its systematic and organic synthesis in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in her two thousand years of history. From Sacred Scripture to the Fathers of the Church, from theological masters to the saints across the centuries, the *Catechism* provides a permanent record of the many ways in which the Church has meditated on the faith and made progress in doctrine so as to offer certitude to believers in their lives of faith.
- In its very structure, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* follows the development of the faith right up to the great themes of daily life. On page after page, we find that what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church. The profession of faith is followed by an account of sacramental life, in which Christ is present, operative and continues to build his Church. Without the liturgy and the sacraments, the profession of faith would lack efficacy, because it would lack the grace which supports Christian witness. By the same criterion, the teaching of the *Catechism* on the moral life acquires its full meaning if placed in relationship with faith, liturgy and prayer.

- In this Year, then, the Catechism of the Catholic Church will serve as a tool providing real support for the faith, especially for those concerned with the formation of Christians, so crucial in our cultural context.
1. Do you own the Catechism of the Catholic Church? Do you use it to find answers that you have about the Catholic Faith? Take 15 minutes to complete the simple tour of the Catechism, pointing out the various components and how they work together. Is it a possibility that you and your family could read one to two paragraphs a night at the dinner table?

Catechism of the Catholic Church

“We thank the Lord wholeheartedly on this day when we can offer the entire Church the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for a catechesis renewed at the living sources of the faith...the teaching of Sacred Scripture, the living Tradition in the Church, and the authentic Magisterium, as well as the spiritual heritage of the Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church...It should also help to illumine with the light of faith the new situations and problems which had not yet emerged in the past.”

Blessed Pope John Paul II

- In the table of contents, what are the four parts of the Catechism, also referred to as pillars? These pillars originate from Acts 2:42:
 “The Apostles devoted themselves to
 - the teaching,
 - to the breaking of bread,
 - to the communal life,
 - and the prayers.”
 - 1) _____ simply referred to as the _____
 - 2) _____ simply referred to as the _____
 - 3) _____ simply referred to as the _____
 - 4) _____ simply referred to as _____
- In addition to the page numbers in the *Catechism*, what other type of referencing is provided on each page? _____
 Why do you think these numbers are provided? _____
- Give the first and last paragraph number for each pillar.

- 1) Creed _____
- 2) Sacraments _____
- 3) Life in Christ _____
- 4) Christian Prayer _____

- Turn to paragraph 210 in the _____ section. What two numbers are referenced in the margin? Paragraph _____ which refers you to a paragraph in the third pillar on how we are to live and paragraph _____ in the fourth pillar on how we are to pray. The *Catechism* states that it offers itself as an organic account of a living *whole*, one in which the different elements are united and are presented in relational fashion (see CCC 11, 18). It also asks to be read in this manner. In other words, the four pillars of the *Catechism* are interrelated.

Note: The numbers in the margin are strategically located. The content of the specific line where a paragraph is referenced in the margin, when you look up the corresponding paragraph, it will have similar content.

How is paragraph 210 related with the paragraphs referenced in the margin?

- Turn to paragraph 396. From the footnotes given in the paragraph, what is referenced at the bottom of the page?

- Turn to paragraph 413. What is the summary called at the end of each section?

- Look in the Index of Citations in the back of the *Catechism*. (The Index of Citations begins on page 689) What is the paragraph number given for Luke 15:11-24? _____ What is the essence of that paragraph?

_____ This could be helpful to if you wanted to look up Church teaching on a specific Scripture passage that you heard at Mass.

- In the Index, what paragraph numbers are provided for Purgatory?

In looking up those paragraph numbers, what three Scripture passages are footnoted and would be helpful in speaking about Purgatory?

- In the Glossary, what is the definition for Prayer?
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(Drawn from *Porta Fidei– The “Door of Faith”*, n. 13)

During this time we will need to keep our gaze fixed upon Jesus Christ, the ‘pioneer and perfecter of our faith’ (Hebrews 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 Christ becoming man, in His sharing our human weakness so as to transform it by the power of His resurrection. In Him who died and rose again for our salvation, the examples of faith that have marked these two thousand years of our salvation history are brought into the fullness of light.

- By faith, Mary accepted the Angel’s word and believed the message that she was to become the Mother of God in the obedience of her devotion (See Lk 1:38). Visiting Elizabeth, she raised her hymn of praise to the Most High for the marvels he worked in those who trust him (See Lk 1:46-55). With joy and trepidation she gave birth to her only son, keeping her virginity intact (See Lk 2:6-7). Trusting in Joseph, her husband, she took Jesus to Egypt to save him from Herod’s persecution (See Mt 2:13-15). With the same faith, she followed the Lord in His preaching and remained with Him all the way to Golgotha (See Jn 19:25-27). By faith, Mary tasted the fruits of Jesus’ resurrection, and treasuring every memory in her heart (See Lk 2:19, 51), she passed them on to the Twelve assembled with her in the Upper Room to receive the Holy Spirit (See Acts 1:14; 2:1-4).
- By faith, the Apostles left everything to follow their Master (See Mk 10:28). They believed the words with which he proclaimed the Kingdom of God present and fulfilled in his person (See Lk 11:20). They lived in communion of life with Jesus who instructed them with His teaching, leaving them a new rule of life, by which they would be recognized as His disciples after His death (See Jn 13:34-35). By faith, they went out to the whole world, following the command to bring the Gospel to all creation (See Mk 16:15) and they fearlessly proclaimed to all the joy of the resurrection, of which they were faithful witnesses.

- By faith, the disciples formed the first community, gathered around the teaching of the Apostles, in prayer, in celebration of the Eucharist, holding their possessions in common so as to meet the needs of the brethren (See Acts 2:42-47).
- By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining to the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors.
- By faith, men and women have consecrated their lives to Christ, leaving all things behind so as to live obedience, poverty and chastity with Gospel simplicity, concrete signs of waiting for the Lord who comes without delay. By faith, countless Christians have promoted action for justice so as to put into practice the word of the Lord, who came to proclaim deliverance from oppression and a year of favor for all (See Lk 4:18-19).
- By faith, across the centuries, men and women of all ages, whose names are written in the Book of Life (See Rev 7:9, 13:8), have confessed the beauty of following the Lord Jesus wherever they were called to bear witness to the fact that they were Christian: in the family, in the workplace, in public life, in the exercise of the charisms and ministries to which they were called.
- By faith, we too live: by the living recognition of the Lord Jesus, present in our lives and in our history.

(Taken from CATHOLICISM, A Journey to the Heart of the Faith, Fr. Robert Barron, Image Books, p. 195, 197).

“The saints are friends of God... who have thereby become....fully human, as alive as God intended them to be. The entire purpose of the Church is to produce saints. Scripture, Tradition, Liturgy, official teaching, moral instruction, and the Sacraments are all means to the end of fostering friendship with God. And this is why knowing and loving the saints is so essential to the life of the Church. We need the saints in order to come to a richer understanding of God, for each saint in his or her particular manner reflects something of God’s perfection”

2. What saint would you like to learn more about during this Year of Faith? Why?

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The “Door of Faith”*, n. 14)

The Year of Faith will also be a good opportunity to intensify the witness of charity. As Saint Paul reminds us: ‘So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love’ (1 Cor 13:13).

- With even stronger words – which have always placed Christians under obligation – Saint James said: “What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, 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? So faith by itself, if it has no

works, is dead. But someone 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" (Jas 2:14-18).

- 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. Indeed, many Christians dedicate their lives with love to those who are lonely, marginalized or excluded, as to those who are the first with a claim on our attention and the most important for us to support, because it is in them that the reflection of Christ's own face is seen. 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" (Mt 25:40). These words are a warning that must not be forgotten and a perennial invitation to return the love by which he takes care of us. It is faith that enables us to recognize Christ and it is his love that impels us to assist Him whenever He becomes our neighbor along the journey of life. 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'" (2 Pet 3:13; cf. Rev 21:10) (Porta Fidei, 14).

3. What person in your life are you able to show greater charity? How can you help someone in need, especially in spiritual need?

4. How is the parish involved in serving those in need? Is there ways that these efforts can be increased?

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The "Door of Faith"*, n. 15)

Having reached the end of his life, Saint Paul asks his disciple Timothy to 'aim at faith' (2 Tim 2:22) with the same constancy as when he was a boy (cf. 2 Tim 3:15). We hear this invitation directed to each of us, that none of us grow lazy in the faith.

- It is the lifelong companion that makes it possible to perceive, ever anew, the marvels that God works for us. Intent on gathering the signs of the times in the present of history, faith commits every one of us to become a living sign of the presence of the Risen Lord in the world. What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.
- 'That the word of the Lord may speed on and triumph' (2 Th 3:1): 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. The words of Saint Peter shed one final ray of light on faith: 'In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested

by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen Him you love Him; though you do not now see Him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls' (1 Pet 1:6-9). The life of Christians knows the experience of joy as well as the experience of suffering. How many of the saints have lived in solitude! How many believers, even in our own day, are tested by God's silence when they would rather hear his consoling voice! The trials of life, while helping us to understand the mystery of the Cross and to participate in the sufferings of Christ (See Col 1:24), are a prelude to the joy and hope to which faith leads: 'when I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor 12:10). We believe with firm certitude that the Lord Jesus has conquered evil and death. With this sure confidence we entrust ourselves to Him: He, present in our midst, overcomes the power of the evil one (See Lk 11:20); and the Church, the visible community of His mercy, abides in Him as a sign of definitive reconciliation with the Father.

5. How can you, with the help of God's grace, become a more credible witness of your faith in Jesus Christ?

6. How can the parish witness more boldly to the fact that people will encounter Christ in the Church?

Personal Response:

How will you personally respond to the call by Pope Benedict XVI to "aim at faith" in order not to grow lazy in the faith? We need to look at the four aspects of the Christian life to ensure we are not growing lazy in the faith:

1) What we believe:

2) How we worship God: especially in the Holy Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation

3) How we live as a disciple of Jesus Christ:

4) How we pray:

Closing Prayer:

(Drawn from *Porta Fidei – The "Door of Faith"*, n. 15)

Let us entrust this time of grace – [the entire Year of Faith] – to the Mother of God, proclaimed "blessed because she believed" (Luke 1:45).

Pray a Hail Mary.