

A Look Inside Lumen Fidei - Year of Faith Talk

I. Introduction

I've decided to speak this evening for a time on Pope Francis' new encyclical on faith called, "Lumen Fidei", "The Light of Faith." As you may know, it was largely completed by Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Francis, without hesitation, made it his own and issued it under his own name. In a sense, we can hear the voices of two pontiffs in one encyclical!

II. The Light of Faith is not Illusory

Let's begin here. The encyclical, as we shall see in more detail, begins with the question of whether the light of faith is real – or whether it is an illusion, as much of the world thinks. In our times, the faith is not thought of so much as light but rather as darkness. In fact, many feel that faith is an actual hindrance in the quest for knowledge. Faith may soothe and console those who seek that sort of thing but it is not part of the search for knowledge. It is an illusory light which hinders a humanity that seeks to be liberated from the constraints of ignorance, myth, superstition, and irrational moral constraint.

In this mode of thinking, the relationship between faith and reason is all but lost. Faith is thought of not as a friend and companion to reason but rather as unreasonable, as anti-rational. Thus, in the not-too-distant-past, modernity put its trust in reason 'liberated' from faith. This was the thrust of the "Enlightenment" and its aftermath.

Over time, however, it became clear such trust was misplaced. In the face of bewildering events such as war on an unprecedented scale, in the face of a very uncertain future in which human annihilation seemed not only possible but likely, reason alone could not adequately light humanity's way. Many became skeptics, abandoning the search for the bigger picture, – the attempt to make sense out of human existence and history – and instead employed reason as dimmer light that helps us find our way moment by moment, trend by trend. Abandoning its search for truth, a lot of confusion ensued: confusion about human dignity, right and wrong,

about the meaning of life itself.

Lumen Fidei urges us once again to see faith as a light, not just as one light among many lights but as the one light capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. A light such as this does not come from ourselves but from an encounter with God who calls us and reveals his love for us ... the love in which we were created, the love upon which our lives are built. When we encounter God's love, our eyes are opened to the Person of Christ who entered human history to redeem us; to the daily journey which *I* must make, a journey that leads me out of myself into relationships with others; and to a future destiny beyond the confines of this world. Only God's love is completely trustworthy; only the light of God's love, fully revealed in Christ, reveals us fully to ourselves, reveals the meaning of life by showing us the Father's love, and unveils our dignity, as well our destiny.

III. Where the Light Came From

To this end, *Lumen Fidei* offers us a summary of salvation history in which the God of love creates the world, creates man in his image and likeness, and reveals himself to humanity:

- beginning with Abraham, our father in faith,
- sustaining and deepening that revelation of his love in his people, Israel,
- fulfilling the faith of Israel by sending his Eternal Son into the world, and
- continuing that mission of salvific love in and through the Church

until the end of time.

The faith of Abraham, the faith of the people of Israel, found its fulfilment in Christ. Scripture & ancient Christian writers saw the faith of Abraham as pointing toward Christ, as a way of believing in Christ in advance. Theirs was a faith that remembered what God had done in times past but pressed on to the future fulfillment of all that God had promised. Christian faith is centered on Christ – it is the confession that Jesus is Lord and that God has raised him from the dead. All the threads of the Old Testament converge on Christ, who is the definitive fulfillment of God's promises and the definitive revelation of God's love.

The proof of the utter reliability of Christ's love lay in his dying for us. In dying for

us ‘while we were yet sinners’ – as St. Paul said – in giving up his life not only for friends but for sinners and enemies, Jesus not only proved the truthfulness, the steadfastness of his love but also its power to change and transform hearts. “This explains why the evangelists could see the hour of Christ’s crucifixion as the culmination of the gaze of faith; in that hour the depth and breadth of God’s love shone forth.”

Yet this gift of love went beyond dying. The utter reliability and power of God’s love is seen in the Resurrection... a love stronger than sin and more powerful than death, to quote Bl. Jn. Paul II. That Jesus entered human history, assumed our human nature, shared in our infirmities and suffering, though innocent took upon himself our sins, underwent the experience of death that epitomizes our alienation from the Creator, and rose from the dead in his human body ... this means that faith in Jesus Christ really does illumine every aspect of our humanity, our history, our human nature – body, mind, spirit – our human frailty . . . this means that faith in Jesus is light for every aspect of our existence and that when Jesus speaks the Word of Truth to us, it is a word that surprises us, leads us beyond ourselves to unseen horizons – yet it is also a word that is by no means alien to us and to our experience. Salvation has come to us because God has engaged our history & our humanity.

But there is another side to faith. Faith means gazing at Jesus who, in revealing the Father’s love, reveals us to ourselves. But we are united with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit precisely so that we can believe in Him. “Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes – it is a participation in his way of seeing.” The Pope charmingly says that we need experts in various aspects of our lives... for example, pharmacists to provide us with medicine, lawyers to defend us in court. When it comes to God we need someone who is trustworthy – and that person is the Father’s only Son coming into the world full of grace and truth: he makes known to us the Eternal Father.

Once we begin to see as Jesus sees, the life of faith begins to take root in us. We live a new life, we are a new creation. But in what does it consist? In accepting the gift of faith, we become God’s children. *We abandon the effort to save ourselves by our own goodness and works* but rather to be open “to something prior to ourselves ... ” viz., God’s love. Faith opens us to a love greater than ourselves, a love that precedes

us but also a love that can transform us from within, every aspect of our lives. Through faith we can begin to see as Jesus sees but also through faith we can begin to love as Jesus loves, with the result that the Father can see and love in us what he sees & loves in Christ. In this way our minds are opened to a truth greater than ourselves, our hearts to a love greater than ourselves... thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit our lives take on a whole new breadth, an openness to God but also an openness to others that makes us fit to become members of Christ's Body, the Church, that prepares us to be a part of the Church's communion of faith. We come to see ourselves in an essential relationship with all other believers... we are united with Christ and at the same time with other believers, past & present. Through communion with Christ in the Church we are opened to all others.

IV. Faith Lights Up Every Aspect of Our Lives

Because faith illumines every aspect of our human lives and history, the Bible describes faith not only as hearing God's Word but also as a way of seeing, seeing the light of God's glory if indeed from afar. Faith comes from hearing but leads to sight, to knowledge and understanding. Whoever believes will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and gaze upon him. The understanding that faith yields prompts us to encounter & contemplate the Lord, it yields a growing awareness of his presence in our lives...it is faith that sees! But in hearing and seeing we also touch the divine realities in which we believe. "In faith we can touch him and receive the power of his grace" ... especially in and through the sacraments. "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life" (1 Jn. 1:1).

In the same vein, the encyclical speaks of the dialogue between faith and reason. It turns out that, in a skeptical world, faith believes in reason, in its capacity for truth, even if that capacity be limited and flawed. The first Christians found that a thirst for truth in the Greco-Roman world and this thirst became decisive for spreading the Gospel, even amid persecution. From that time onward there has been a dialogue between faith and reason, one that continues in our own times. Faith helps us see that those things we love in life contain a ray of understanding that can help lead us to the source of life, all knowledge, all truth, and all love. Many think of truth as entirely subjective (my truth is not your truth) and fear that a common truth would lead to totalitarianism that would stifle all individual creativity and thought. But faith

leads to a truth of love that can be imposed but proposed. Far from stifling the individual, faith opens them to truth and love. Far from discounting the material world, the scientific world, faith is lived in and through the created world & encourages scientists and thinkers to be open to reality in all its richness & wonder.

The light of faith in Jesus also illumines the path of those who seek for God precisely because our life in Christ penetrates to the core of our existence. It is not divorced from the world, but right in the heart of earthly reality, right in the heart of our human experience. As we draw nearer to the light of God's love, we are not consumed but rather our lights begin to glow more brightly ... in a way that helps attract and light the way of those who are searching. Those who set out to do go to others may find that in loving others they are led to the source of love. Helping others to search for God in a way that does not take him for granted is very much a part of the New Evangelization.

V. BVM/Conclusion

Lumen Fidei concludes with a brief meditation on the Blessed Virgin Mary. It portrays Mary's sinless heart and the goodness of her life as the most fertile of soil for the seed of the Gospel, a soil that has borne fruit beyond all imagining. The encyclical also makes reference to the memory of Mary, who stored in her Immaculate Heart all the mysteries of Christ, overshadowed as she was by the Holy Spirit. She is preeminently the woman of faith: "Blessed is she who believed..."

The encyclical references the history of holy women of whom Mary is preeminent. It shows how Mary is the prime exemplar of how faith shapes every aspect of our existence and sets us on the path of follow Christ — even to the foot of the Cross. Mary embodied all that God promised, she embodied the Kingdom of the Beatitudes, and she shared in the paschal mystery more fully than any other human being. Mary points out to us her Son Jesus, and all the mysteries of our faith, and to the entire sweep of God's plan to save the world, to salvation history itself. Just as she prayed with the Apostles for the coming of the Holy Spirit, so too she prays that *we* will open *our* hearts to the Holy Spirit so that, transformed by faith, we may be the Lord's witnesses in our world, and that the light of faith may increase in us until the day of the Lord dawns in all its splendor.

Dear friends, this encyclical letter, *Lumen Fidei* is a great gift, not only to the Church, but to all men and women of good will, and to all who are seeking the truth. As we read in the letter, “Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey.”

Today, here in Mary’s House, we ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, who ‘believed that was spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled,’ to obtain for all of us, throughout the journey of our lives, the saving gift of the light of faith.

May God bless us and keep us always in His love!