

'Faith without truth does not save'

By Archbishop William E. Lori

This is the second in a four-part series by Archbishop Lori focusing on Pope Francis' encyclical "Lumen Fidei."

You can read Part 1: "A look inside Lumen Fidei in the Year of Faith," [here](#).

Part 3: Sacraments pass down the fullness of our faith

Archbishop William E. Lori continues his four-part series on Pope Francis' encyclical, "Lumen Fidei," for the Year of Faith, which concludes Nov. 24.

The title of the encyclical's second chapter is "Unless You Believe You Will Not Understand." From Isaiah 7:9, these are the words the prophet Isaiah spoke to the wavering King Ahaz.

Ahaz was terrified of his enemies. Isaiah was telling him that to believe in God's promises was to be established upon the rock of God's truth and trustworthiness. The Greek translation says that belief leads to understanding, in the sense of having our lives firmly established in the truth.

In view of the encyclical's central point – faith illumines the whole of human existence – how inadequate, therefore, is a notion of faith which divorces it from truth: "Faith without truth does not save, it does not provide a sure footing," the encyclical notes. "It is a beautiful story, the projection of our deep yearning for happiness, something capable of satisfying us to the extent we are willing to deceive ourselves."

But faith and truth go together, and how important for the times in which we live. Our age considers truth that can be seen and measured as the only real truth. Technological and scientific truth is considered to be valid. But any other kind of truth is up for grabs. We live in an age of relativism when the opinion of the powerful prevails, not because it is actually true but because it is put forward in a powerful way. Since relativism rejects universal truth, God is crowded out of the picture.

Today the bond between religion and truth is also suspect because it is thought to be at the root of fanaticism which seeks to oppress anyone who may not agree. Yet the truth of which the encyclical speaks is not an ideology to be imposed. Rather, the encyclical tells us that truth is really a question of memory, memory of our common origins, memory of the law written on our hearts, a memory that unites us in a way that goes beyond our everyday concerns. In remembering our common origins we

can also glimpse the goal of our lives and thus see more clearly the common path we tread as human beings.

So how can the church's faith, and we who believe, contribute to a proper understanding of truth? St. Paul tells us that, "One believes with the heart," which in the Bible means, "the core of one's being." The heart is what holds us together – body, mind and spirit. And it is faith that transforms the entire human person, so much so that he or she becomes open to love.

Love is not a blind emotion. Rather, faith opens us to love because love itself brings enlightenment. Faith opens us to God's immense love that transforms us from within and enables us to see reality with new eyes. If truth is tied to love, so too love is tied to truth. Without truth, love becomes a fleeting emotion and does not last.

The encyclical points out that "True love, on the other hand, unifies all the elements of our person and becomes a new light pointing to a great and fulfilled life." Love needs truth and truth needs love. We seek "an understanding of enlightened love" (William of St-Thierry). The knowledge, the truth that comes from faith is born of God's love and is capable of illuminating not only every facet of our being but also the entire path of human history.

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 and 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.

According to the encyclical, "In faith we can touch him and receive the power of his grace," especially in and through the sacraments. In signs perceptible to the senses of hearing, seeing, touching, the sacraments enable us to encounter the Christ who is the center of our faith. "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 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 all 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 cannot 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, encouraging scientists and thinkers to be open to reality in all its richness and wonder.

The light of faith in Jesus also illumines the path of those who seek 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 good 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.

So too is theology more than merely an effort of human reason to analyze and understand religion. Theology is a science of faith. It is a participation in God’s knowledge of himself, not merely our efforts to talk about God in learned ways. It is done in communion with the church, the pope and the bishops, and with a desire to protect the faith of ordinary believers.

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