

Sacraments pass down the fullness of our faith

By Archbishop William E. Lori

This is the third 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 II: Faith without truth does not save

This is the third 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 II: Faith without truth does not save. If the first two chapters of "Lumen Fidei" were about the gift of faith, the second two chapters of the encyclical are about sharing the faith. It is proclaiming what we have heard.

It is allowing the glory of God shining on the face of Christ first to illumine our hearts and then to shine forth in our words and deeds. It is spreading the light to envelop the darkness just as we do at the Easter Vigil.

It travels from place to place and from one generation to the next. Yet in this process how can we be certain that it is the "real Jesus" who is proclaimed and believed in? As individuals we cannot achieve such certainty but we can if we are part of the church's memory which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, has reminded us of all Jesus taught and kept alive in both his presence and saving deeds. Through the church's memory, we are all contemporaries of Jesus.

So, too, it is impossible to believe on our own. Faith always takes place within the communion of the church. In saying "I believe," we are part of the fellowship of the church, thus we can also say, "We believe." The God in whom we believe is a communion of persons upon which the church is modeled and in whose communion she shares.

Faith puts us in relationship to believers, as the encyclical states: "After the cleansing we are welcomed in the home of our mother, the church and as part of a new family, pray the Our Father together with their brothers and sisters."

The faith is transmitted not only as a word that is taught but indeed in the celebration of the sacraments. Transmitting the faith is more than handing down a venerable idea which might be contained in a book or handed on as a spoken message. But what the church hands on in her living tradition is "the new light born

of an encounter with the true God, a light which touches us at the core of our being and engages our minds, wills and emotions, opening us to relationships lived in communion.”

The special means for passing down this fullness, a means that engages the whole person – is the sacraments. Further, we rightly speak of the sacraments of faith, for the sacraments presuppose faith. But it can also be said that the faith itself has “a sacramental structure.”

“Our Redeemer’s visible presence has passed into the sacraments,” wrote Pope St. Leo the Great in the fifth century. As faith awakens, we can see how visible, material sacramental signs point beyond themselves to presence, the words and the deeds of Christ and enable us to touch the divine realities we profess to believe in.

The faith is transmitted first and foremost through baptism. The rites of baptism are more than a pedagogical tool. They do more than illustrate the faith we profess. No, through baptism we participate in the death, burial and rising of Christ. We become a new creation; what we profess gives rise to a whole new way of life that demands the engagement of the whole person and sets us on a path to goodness. The baptized are to live this new way of life in the church.

One is baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” By that very fact, at our baptism, we become a part of salvation history, the journey from the calling of Abraham, to the faith of Israel, to fulfillment in Christ, and to salvation in and through the church. Water is a symbol of both death and life, for we die to sin and self and rise to newness of life. The baptized are immersed in water which symbolizes how the work of Christ penetrates to the depths of our being and transforms us radically. We receive a new name, a new identity, so as to say that we have become adopted children of God and sharers in the divine nature.

The sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist itself is known as “the mystery of faith” for the true Presence of Christ and the re-presentation of his death and resurrection proclaims, strengthens and nourishes our faith in an incomparable way. In the Eucharist, the eyes of faith see the living memory of the church at work. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the church not only recalls what Christ said and did to save us, but indeed his presence, His saving words and deeds become a present reality. In other words, we become the contemporaries of Christ. The bread and wine are completely changed in Christ’s Body and Blood, so that we might share ever more deeply in Christ’s death and resurrection, and thus be drawn, body and soul, into the movement of Christ to the Father, a movement that includes ourselves and all creation.

Finally, in this third chapter, the encyclical reminds us of the unity and integrity of faith. We are not talking merely about a system, like a mechanical system, which requires all its parts to be in the right place and functioning perfectly. Rather, the

faith is one because the Triune God is one. The faith is one because there is but “one Lord, one faith, one baptism.” The faith is one because it is shared by the whole church. We profess the faith of the church in union with the apostles, the saints, the pope, the bishops and the church throughout the world. By professing the faith in union with the whole church we can come to see the unity and integrity of the faith, how what the church professes, gives rise to a life of sacramental worship, to a way of living, and to way of intimacy and gratitude through prayer to the living God.

Because the faith is one it must be professed in its purity and integrity. This is not a question of ideological purity (as in totalitarian systems) but rather a recognition that everything the church professes is interconnected. To deny one of the articles of faith is to distort them all. The faith is handed on in its unity, integrity and purity through the Magisterium which, in obedience and in service to God’s Word, preserves and explains the faith of the church from age to age.

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