

## Renewed in the gift of faith

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The Holy Father has asked for a Year of Faith beginning this October 11 and continuing through November 24, 2013. Recently I shared some of my thoughts about the Year of Faith with more than 1,800 catechists who attended the Catechetical Convocation on Sept. 15.

The work of our catechists, as teachers of the faith with adults, young adults and children is vitally important for the Church and for the world. What they do changes lives. Over the course of the year we will host different activities, speakers and Masses in the diocese, all focused on different aspects of the Year of Faith, but what will really make the year effective will be the day-to-day work by which our faith, as a people is renewed.

During this Year of Faith, my hope and prayer is that we will be given the grace to gaze more intently upon the face of Christ. In this way we will be renewed in the gift of faith which He gives to us. I urge all catechists, parish leaders and religious, deacons and priests to seek this renewal of faith by focusing upon the essential aspects of our faith in Christ Jesus: the Incarnation, the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the Son of God.

First, the world needs to know that the love of God is concrete. It's not just an idea. It's not just an abstract concept. *El amor de Dios bajo del cielo*. The love of God came down from heaven. He showed himself in flesh and blood.

The world has a vague, general idea of love, but *we have seen*, as St. John tells us in his first letter, "*we have seen with our own eyes, we have touched with our own hands, the Word of life.*" So what do we believe? We say it every Sunday in the Creed, "by the Holy Spirit he was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man." Faith leads us to appreciate that the love of God in Christ is very concrete, it is very real. We celebrate this throughout the year, but especially at the Feast of the Annunciation, during Advent and at Christmas time.

What is more beautiful than letting people know the Good News that God himself came down to be with us? This is exactly what we believe and what we teach. Because of this faith we never lose hope, because God himself has drawn so very near to us. "If God is for us," as St. Paul says, "who can be against us?"

Secondly, during this Year of Faith, I would like for us to keep in mind that we believe that Jesus Christ, who is God himself come down from heaven, has himself taken the cross, and has suffered death. Again, we profess this saving faith every Sunday when we pray the Creed, we celebrate it every Mass, and we solemnly recall this mystery of love every time we enter into Lent and Holy Week.

We must refocus the eyes of the Church on the beauty of the cross as the highest sign of love. The love of God has shown itself faithful even to the extreme moment of the Cross. We must share the beauty of this gift in whatever ways we can, with young people, with older people, with all people. By faith in the Cross, we are renewed in the hope that love has strength to bear all things. The love of God in Christ Jesus overcomes all obstacles; Love met all human sin on the Cross, all lies, all cowardice and calumny, and the sin gave way. Sin and death lost their force when Christ accepted to love us from the Cross. We contemplate the Cross and we are moved to love in return.

Thirdly, we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Sin and death can crucify the flesh of the Word Incarnate, but they cannot hold him in the tomb. He is risen. We believe this with all our heart, mind and soul. Why is it so important to share this? Let us be frank: We live in a world where it is possible sometimes seriously to doubt that in the end truth, goodness, life and love win over the powers that oppose them. We click on to the Internet, or turn on the television, and see all sorts bad news. Violence, lies, and unbridled greed at every turn. We, and our neighbors, often can get discouraged, and perhaps even despair over the power of goodness.

This is why deepening our faith and sharing the faith is so vital today. We, our neighbors, and the whole world need to be renewed in the hope that it matters to be good, and that it matters to persevere in love, despite all obstacles. In Christ Jesus, we know that love wins. Only if we believe in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is it possible for us to have the strength and courage we need to live this life with confidence in the power of goodness, truth and love to triumph over sin and death.

The world needs to hear what we hold in faith, so that courage might be renewed to live in hope. Without hope, we give up and give in to what afflicts us. And what most afflicts us in the world today is a loss of confidence in the goodness of life.

Our young people need to know that it's ok to hope in something better. That it doesn't have to be all about lies, power, control and money. There are more important things in life. If we do not promote and advance the cult of the living God and venerate the triumph of his love over sin and death, the only final alternative left for the world is the cult to death—*el culto de la muerte*. Sadly, we know this to be true.

What our catechists do is so very important because without the knowledge of the faith that they share, hope fails, and love turns cold. Their work revitalizes our sense of having been loved by God in Christ Jesus. This makes it possible for us to love him and one another in return. And upon this depends our life and the life of the world.

Next month, I will share with you a few thoughts about how we can be renewed during the year of Faith in our celebration of these mysteries of God's love.