

# A Family Prayer for the Year of Faith

O God our Father,  
in Jesus you call all Christian families and homes  
to be signs of living faith.  
By the light of the Holy Spirit,  
lead us to be thankful for the gift of faith,  
and by that gift  
may we grow in our relationship with Jesus, your Son,  
and be confident witnesses to Christian hope and joy  
to all we meet.



In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

## Getting a head start to the Year of Faith

Pope Benedict XVI has given us the opportunity to grow in our knowledge and participation in the Faith; here is what you need to know to make this special year meaningful

By Eric Sammons - OSV Newsweekly, 10/7/2012



Last year, Pope Benedict XVI announced a “Year of Faith” for the universal Church to begin Oct. 11, 2012, and end on Nov. 24, 2013, the feast of Christ the King. The pope chose the opening date to associate the Year of Faith with three momentous occasions in the life of the Church: (1) the 50th anniversary of the commencement of the Second Vatican Council; (2) the 20th anniversary of the release of the Catechism of the Catholic Church; and (3) the World Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization to be held Oct. 7-28 at the Vatican.

What is a “Year of Faith?” Why has the pope called one now? Why is it associated with the events listed above? And what can the average Catholic do to participate in this Year of Faith?

### Year of Faith

It is important first to remember what “faith” is: It is both the content of what we believe and the act by which we give our total assent to the reality behind that content. For example, when we recite the Nicene Creed during the Mass, we both profess the chief truths of the Catholic faith (content), and we affirm our acceptance of that faith (act).

During a “Year of Faith,” the Church refocuses its energies toward both these aspects: the content of the faith and the consequences of accepting and living that faith. In 1967, Pope Paul VI called a Year of Faith to commemorate the 19th

centenary of the martyrdom of Sts. Peter and Paul. He wished at that time, just a few years after Vatican II, for the Church to make “an authentic and sincere profession of the same faith” held by those two great apostles.

In *Porta Fidei* (“Door of Faith”), his October 2011 apostolic letter announcing the special year, Pope Benedict described this Year of Faith as “a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Savior of the world” (No. 6). In a way, this Year of Faith is simply a continuation of the overriding theme of Pope Benedict’s pontificate: encountering Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church. In the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (“God is Love”), the pontiff wrote, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, who gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” The Year of Faith is intended to call people to that encounter and to make it concrete and widely known.

### **Council and Catechism**

The timing of the beginning of the Year of Faith — Oct. 11 — is no accident. This is both the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. By choosing this date, the pope is underlining the importance of both these milestones in recent Church history — and their importance in celebrating the Year of Faith.

In Pope Benedict’s view (as in his predecessor’s), the proper interpretation of Vatican II is essential to the Church’s revitalization. In fact, Pope Benedict quotes Blessed Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter, writing:

“It seemed to me that timing the launch of the Year of Faith to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council would provide a good opportunity to help people understand that the texts bequeathed by the Council Fathers, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, ‘have lost nothing of their value or brilliance. They need to be read correctly, to be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the magisterium, within the Church’s tradition ... I feel more than ever in duty bound to point to the Council as the great grace bestowed on the Church in the 20th century: there we find a sure compass by which to take our bearings in the century now beginning.’ I would also like to emphasize strongly what I had occasion to say concerning the Council a few months after my election as Successor of Peter: ‘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’ ” (*Porta Fidei*, No. 5)

Thus, we must return to the documents of Vatican II and work to understand and live them authentically. And this is where the Catechism comes into play: Pope Benedict believes that the Catechism not only represents a beautiful presentation of the content of the Faith, but also an “authentic fruit” (*Porta Fidei*, No. 4) of Vatican II. In other words, if the Church is faithful to the call of the Council Fathers, it will result in magnificent results such as the Catechism.

### **Synod of Bishops**

The opening of the Year of Faith also coincides with the Oct. 7-18 World Synod of Bishops on the theme of “New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith,” indicating that the pope does not conceive of the Year of Faith solely as an internal affair.

We are not to be content with simply learning our faith more deeply, or even living it better — we are also called to bear witness of our relationship with Jesus Christ in the Catholic Church. We must evangelize using the means and methods by which we can most effectively reach people in our modern context.

The Synod of Bishops in Rome will be an integral part of the Year of Faith, for it will guide the 21st-century Church in the work of sharing the faith with others.

*Eric Sammons writes from Florida.*

## The New Evangelization

The "new evangelization" began with Pope Paul VI, who first realized that the modern Church faces a new phenomenon: the need to evangelize cultures which have become "de-Christianized." Pope John Paul II then gave his predecessor's insight a concrete direction when he outlined his call for a "new evangelization," inviting the Church to find new methods and a new ardour in the evangelization of cultures. The crisis of secularism, in which even professed Christians live as if there is no God, is one the Church must not avoid, for it is the crisis of our day. Pope Benedict XVI, like his predecessors Paul VI and John Paul II, has embraced this evangelization challenge, establishing a Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, and now calling a World Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization. But what does all this mean for the average Catholic? The very nature of the crisis today requires each of us to engage in the new evangelization. In the past, evangelization usually meant missions: going to a foreign land to proclaim the Gospel to those who had never heard of Christ. Thus, only certain people became missionaries and performed this task. Today, however, the mission fields are not far-off lands, but our own neighborhoods, families, and workplaces. We are all called to these missions. In this Year of Faith, let each of us take concrete steps to deepen our knowledge and practice of the faith so that it might overflow into the lives of those around us.

## 20th Anniversary of the Catechism

By the early 1990s, the Church had endured two decades of poor catechesis. Too many catechetical programs had been co-opted by a feelings-based curriculum. The typical content of many catechetical classes, "How do you feel about God's love, Johnny?" replaced the Baltimore Catechism's "A sacrament is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." Then, in 1992, the Vatican released the Catechism of the Catholic Church — an authoritative text that clearly explains the whole content of the Faith for the modern world. The reaction by the "religion experts" was one of derision: "No one will read that!" was a common response. It was believed that the Catechism might be purchased by a few theologians and universities, but would be ignored by most Catholics. Yet, when the English translation was released in 1994, it was an immediate best-seller — just about every Catholic, from the parish priest to the average family, wanted a copy. And not just to sit on the mantel: Catholics far and wide studied the Catechism; just about every catechetical book was revised to be in conformity with it, and many books and articles were published to help Catholics better understand it. Both Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI have seen the Catechism as an authentic fruit of Vatican II. It returned to the biblical and patristic sources of the Faith and presented its truths in a way that resounds with the modern heart. We can be thankful to have such a clear and helpful guide in our walk with Christ.

## Pope Paul VI's Year of Faith

In 1967 the Catholic Church faced a crisis of immense proportions. Following Vatican II, many within the Church called for a deeper embrace of the surrounding culture—a culture that at that time was rapidly rejecting both God and any authority. The Church was facing a true crisis of faith. Pope Paul VI saw this situation and was alarmed by it. So in response, on Feb. 22, 1967, he called a "Year of Faith," which was to celebrate the 19th centenary of the martyrdoms of Sts. Peter and Paul.

The 1967 Year of Faith was called to reaffirm the Catholic profession of faith as so wonderfully proclaimed by the two great apostles, Sts. Peter and Paul. It was to remind a secularizing Church that the internal "engine" of the entire Church is this profession of faith. All programs, outreaches and ministries are for naught if they do not draw from the core content of Catholicism: that there is one God in three persons, that God the Son became man for our salvation, and that the Holy Spirit is with us to sanctify us and mold us into the image of Christ.

At the end of this Year of Faith, Pope Paul VI released the apostolic letter "Credo of the People of God" — a

reworking of the traditional Nicene Creed. This Credo was not written to replace the Nicene Creed, but instead as a catechetical tool to allow modern people to better understand the traditional creed. It followed the Trinitarian order of the Nicene Creed, but then added sections on other elements of the Catholic faith: Mary, original sin, the Church, the Eucharist and the Word of God.

When he called the upcoming Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI recalled the 1967 observance:

"It is not the first time that the Church has been called to celebrate a Year of Faith. My venerable predecessor the Servant of God Paul VI announced one in 1967, to commemorate the martyrdom of Sts. Peter and Paul on the 19th centenary of their supreme act of witness. He thought of it as a solemn moment for the whole Church to make 'an authentic and sincere profession of the same faith'; moreover, he wanted this to be confirmed in a way that was 'individual and collective, free and conscious, inward and outward, humble and frank.' He thought that in this way the whole Church could reappropriate 'exact knowledge of the faith, so as to reinvigorate it, purify it, confirm it, and confess it.' The great upheavals of that year made even more evident the need for a celebration of this kind. It concluded with the Credo of the People of God, intended to show how much the essential content that for centuries has formed the heritage of all believers needs to be confirmed, understood and explored ever anew, so as to bear consistent witness in historical circumstances very different from those of the past" (Porta Fidei, No. 4).

## 50th Anniversary of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council, held from 1962-1965, is unquestionably the most influential event in the Catholic Church in the 20th century. It has impacted every aspect of Catholic life. As we reach the 50th anniversary of its opening, it is becoming more and more possible to view the Council more objectively, although our generation is still too close to it not to be skewed in our perspective, to some extent. One thing is clear however: Benedict XVI (who along with Pope John Paul II participated at Vatican II) sees it as one of his primary tasks as pope to correctly interpret the Council and to implement it as the Council Fathers intended. Yet such a task certainly has been Herculean. There are those who believe the Council was simply the beginning of a more intensive opening to the world. Although the Council itself did not endorse such practices as artificial contraception and women priests, many who advocate for a "Spirit of Vatican II" believe that the Council was the first step in embracing these practices. On the other hand, there is a small but vocal contingent within the Church who believe Vatican II should be jettisoned. All the problems within the Church have been placed at the feet of the Council and thus a rejection of the Council would, according to this line of thought, bring back the good times.

For Pope Benedict, this Year of Faith is one more opportunity to study the texts of Vatican II so that they might "be read correctly, ... be widely known and taken to heart as important and normative texts of the magisterium, within the Church's tradition."