

ENCOURAGEMENT

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The Host Apostolate
www.thehostapostolate.org
14, Goatbeck Terrace,
Langley Moor,
County Durham,
DH7 8JJ
United Kingdom

Year of Faith... Endings and Beginnings

Alpha and Omega... the beginning and the end. The Lord our God is both and so too is our journey of Faith. We have now come to the conclusion of the Year of Faith which was initiated by Pope Benedict. It has been a time of renewal and exploration and there have been many ways in which our year has been a challenge. We have seen the coming of a new pope and the resignation of another both a sign of The Spirit's presence among us. We have been on pilgrimages and talks, gatherings and sharings. Here in Durham we have been seeing the Gospels of Lindisfarne and deepening our realisation of the continuity of faith that will always be a hallmark of the church. But is that it...? Does it all now fade into an interesting year now to be put aside or have doors been opened to us that we must now go through to grow in faith and love of our neighbour.

Our faith is a wonderful gift from God and must be treasured as such. It is vital that in order for the seedling to grow into a mighty oak tree it has to be watered, tended, developed and persevered with. Like any gift it has to be used and shared. Like a tree it does not only have deep roots but it has branches and leaves, which stand as sign of what it is. The leaves sometime fall but new life and growth replaces the old and in springtime it has potential for more beauty. So too our faith. WE all have moments when the leaves seem to be falling and we feel rather vulnerable and unsure but then the time passes and we start again to grow new ways of looking at what we believe.

For A Christian our faith is nurtured by reflecting and living out the Gospels and following Jesus' teaching. Sometimes pondering its meaning, sometimes having insight into the words, sometimes searching our hearts for the truth, and sometimes going to share and ask for guidance from others. All these elements are essential for our faith to remain, as 'The Word' is, alive and active. This sharing was so much part of the life of the early church. We see how in the lives of so many disciples one life follows on closely from another each

with a special mission and gifts and insights.

Yet without prayer, active listening to God and service we will soon reduce all to mere words that cannot impact on our lives. The year of faith surely should also be a spring board to greater participation in our Church and Communities either directly or with some service for others that we can take upon ourselves. Faith, true faith, should lead us to a perspective of both individual and collective participation and a building up the Kingdom of God. Faith otherwise is no more than an belief system, a theory, a philosophy, which has little or no impact on the way we live or can possibly influence others to follow the Master.

This year has also seen much tragedy and strife between people and nations. A 'springtime' for so many countries has become deep winter and many lives are being lost in international and national conflicts. We hear of great courage and needless loss of life. For this to end we must be willing to pray and offer our small sacrifices to end the violence and bring true peace. WE must also be aware of the cost of discipleship as we hear of those who are willing to die for the faith that we share. These Martyrs of our time are many more that we think and of all ages and cultures. We must not close our eyes to the price that they pay so that others can believe. There are places where even to admit to being a Christian has severe consequences. For some the year of faith has been a very demanding year of witness. For these we must thank God and prayer ceaselessly, for one day we may be put to the test ourselves. Will we be found wanting?

So let us begin rather than end this year of faith. With God there is no start and finish and so we must continue to seek and find, serve and love. We are destined to have life everlasting and so our journey continues... For one person who probably represents many this has been a very special year of faith but I leave you with her own words..... H.H.



FAITH IS TO BELIEVE WHAT YOU DO NOT SEE: THE REWARD OF FAITH IS TO SEE WHAT YOU BELIEVE
ST. AUGUSTINE

.....I would like to share with you a little of what this Year of Faith has meant to me but firstly I would like to give you some background information.

I was baptised in the Congregational Church in 1958. I enjoyed Sunday School but was not confirmed. As the years passed I grew away/apart from the Church. I met my husband to be and began attending church again. I call it 'attending' because it was so far from what I now feel in my heart when I am in church knowing that Jesus is present in the Tabernacle. Unfortunately, yet again, I drifted away.

Then came a series of life-changing events culminating in a move to a totally different area. In this locality was a Roman Catholic Church, which somehow through a series of 'coincidences' seemed to be drawing me towards it. I plucked up courage to go to Mass one day, even though the only part I was familiar with was the Hail Mary, which my mother, for some reason, had taught me. I received a warm welcome from the Priest, which put me at ease, although each time I went to Mass I sat right at the back and it took me a year to venture down for a Blessing as I considered myself to be unworthy. Two years have passed since I first crossed the threshold and in October I hope to be received into the Catholic Church-Faith.

It seems utterly incredible now but when I began my catechesis, instruction and guidance from a 'lay catechist' I found that I had either forgotten or misinterpreted the basic fundamentals. It's amazing once you start to wander, just how far away from the Truth and the Light you can get. For instance I had come to view my Baptism as a kind of official naming ceremony, totally forgetting that through it I was a child of God and had received gifts from the Holy Spirit. I also tried to find comfort and reassurance in fortune tellers and a spiritualist church, which I found to be an unpleasant experience which evoked negative emotions and was rather frightening. There were many emotions too, to work through as I went along.

I can hardly wait for October so that I can make my first Confession, to be confirmed and to make my first Holy Communion. I have managed for so long on so little but soon I will be given all that I need. Each time I go to Mass I will receive the Body and Blood of Christ which will sustain me throughout the rest of my earthly journey and beyond it into Eternal Life and Eternal Joy.

Recently in Church the organ played a very sweet and beautiful piece of Music that I vividly recalled hearing

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as a child while seated in a pew by an 'I am the light of the world' stained glass window. My heart leapt and I thought 'I am BACK, I have come Home'. I looked around me and all my brothers and sisters in Faith and I was GLAD.

D.C.



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year, as we celebrate World Mission Day, the Year of Faith, which is an important opportunity to strengthen our friendship with the Lord and our journey as a Church that preaches the Gospel with courage, comes to an end. From this perspective, I would like to propose some reflections.

Faith is God's precious gift, which opens our mind to know and love him. He wants to enter into relationship with us and allow us to participate in his own life in order to make our life more meaningful, better and more beautiful. God loves us! Faith, however, needs to be accepted, it needs our personal response, the courage to entrust ourselves to God, to live his love and be grateful for his infinite mercy. It is a gift, not reserved for a few but offered with generosity. Everyone should be able to experience the joy of being loved by God, the joy of salvation! It is a gift that one cannot keep to oneself, but it is to be shared. If we want to keep it only to ourselves, we will become isolated, sterile and sick Christians. The proclamation of the Gospel is part of being disciples of Christ and it is a constant commitment that animates the whole life of the church.

Each community is therefore challenged, and invited to make its own, the mandate entrusted by Jesus to the Apostles, to be his "witnesses in to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) and this, not as a secondary aspect of Christian life, but as its essential aspect: we are all invited to walk the streets of the world with our brothers and sisters, proclaiming and witnessing to our faith in Christ and making ourselves heralds of his Gospel.

Pope Francis I, (adapted) Rome 2013

Papal Prayer Intention for October; That the celebration of World Mission Day may help all Christians realise that we are not only receivers but proclaimers of God's Word.



Saints' Feasts Thérèse, 1st Guardian Angels, 2nd Francis of Assisi, 4th Faustyna, 5th Our Lady of the Rosary, 7th Bd. John H. Newman, 9th Teresa of Avila, 15th Margaret Mary, 16th Luke Evan, 18th Paul of the Cross, 19th Chad, 26th.