



**Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Nottingham  
appointed to be read at all Masses  
on the Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time,  
Saturday 13 / Sunday 14 October 2012**

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, has announced a Year of Faith that will run from Thursday 11 October 2012 until Sunday 24 November 2013, the Solemnity of Christ the King. This Year of Faith, which was opened by the Pope in St Peter's Basilica in Rome on Thursday, marks two significant anniversaries: fifty years ago the Second Vatican Council was opened by Blessed John XXIII, and this year is also the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The Year of Faith provides us with opportunities for renewing and deepening our faith through liturgy, prayer and study. Today in St Barnabas' Cathedral in Nottingham, people will gather from each of our parishes for a liturgical celebration to open the Year of Faith in our diocese. There will be many other occasions throughout the year when you will be invited to take part in events in your parishes and schools that will call you to a deeper understanding of your vocation to be a Catholic in today's world.

My favourite definition of 'faith' is the one found in the old 'penny' catechism. In answer to the question, 'What is faith?' the reply is given that: 'Faith is a supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed.'

I like this because it reminds us that faith is a gift from God, a grace. It is the way in which God the Father, who is the source of all truth, enables us to

believe in him as our Creator, in his Son Jesus, our Saviour, and in the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. There is a great freedom about faith: because it is a gift, we can either take it or reject it. Unlike reason, which because of its inner logic demands that we accept its conclusions as true, faith is more gentle and coaxing, enabling us to believe because of the love which God showers on us.

Another thing to remember is that God has revealed what we believe. For Catholics, this divine Revelation is given to us in both Scripture and Tradition. The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has interpreted the Revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures through the ages. Our faith has been passed down to us and it is our responsibility to pass it on intact to the next generation. In other words, we don't make it up for ourselves.

Nowadays people often make up their religion, choosing a bit of spirituality from one tradition and customs from another – a kind of mix-and-match religion. Furthermore, modern people will often only accept as true that which they can authenticate for themselves. So, unless something can be proved to one's own satisfaction, then it cannot be believed.

However, Pope Benedict suggests a way of developing our personal faith. We don't all have to become theologians and try to prove everything we believe, or develop a fantastic memory so that we can learn the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* off by heart. Rather, the Pope points out that 'Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy.' (*Porta Fidei*, 7)

And that, of course, is the way in which most of us deepen our faith: through a close relationship with Jesus. What greater experience of love is there than to receive Jesus in Holy Communion? It is through receiving him that we come to believe more firmly in him. In this way, some of the great doctrines of the Catholic faith take on meaning.

For example, it is hard for us to understand and explain the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, but through our closeness to Jesus, his Spirit praying in us through the Son to the Father, the Trinity becomes a very real experience in our daily prayer life. Being wrapped up in God's love in this way reinforces our belief in him. And we can be sure that discovering God's love through being an active Christian, trying to live out the Gospel from day to day, also confirms our belief in God, who made us in his own image and likeness and who calls us to follow the Gospel in our daily lives.

So the doctrines which form the Deposit of Faith that is passed down to us are not dry words in a book; rather, they take on life through the personal relationships we form with Jesus. Faith takes on a practical form when it is personalised in this way: having a friendship with Jesus means discovering his love in other people who form his body, the Church. It means reaching out to the people who Jesus cared for; it means listening to him in prayer and shaping our lives to be his disciples.

Do we have such total trust in Jesus that we would follow him at all costs? Could we, like the first disciples, leave behind our livelihood and follow him if he called us in this way? I don't suppose that St Peter was an expert theologian who knew every aspect of his faith – yet he followed Jesus when called. He trusted him; he believed in him.

Pope Benedict has entrusted this Year of Faith to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. In our Diocese, especially in our schools, Mary, Woman of Faith, will guide us on our journey. Mary was the first and most faithful disciple of Jesus; she followed him to the Cross, and was in the midst of the disciples when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This openness to God's will, when she consented to receiving the precious gift of Jesus in her womb, continued throughout her life, so that she was able to receive the gift of the same Spirit once more at Pentecost, giving birth to the Church. She is for us a wonderful model of a faithful person. May she inspire us and pray for us on our journey of faith in the months to come.

The Year of Faith which we are embarking on this week calls us to deepen our faith and live it more fully. So let us open ourselves to receive the gift of faith anew. God will help us to understand and believe in his Revelation by the love he shows us – and by encouraging us to live our faith in new and exciting ways.

With my prayers and every good wish for you and your families,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name 'Malcolm' in a cursive script.

Right Reverend Malcolm McMahon OP  
Bishop of Nottingham



**Bishop's House  
Nottingham**

**October 2012**