



# the pOpe speaks

## CONCLUDING THE "YEAR OF FAITH"

In the General Audience on Wednesday June 19th, the Holy Father Paul VI continued his exhortations in view of the closing of the "Year of Faith", now emphasizing the meaning and urgent need of a live faith, whilst warning the imminent danger of faith becoming dead.

Dear Sons and Daughters,

As you know, with the end of this month the "Year of Faith" will be concluded, the year which We have dedicated to the remembrance of the 19th centenary of the martyrdom of Ss. Peter and Paul, not only to honour their memory, but to fortify the obligation we have towards the inheritance which they, with their word and their blood, have left to us, namely our faith. There might be many things remaining for us to say on this theme, about which We have said a few fleeting words in these weekly audiences. We would add one more word now, the most obvious that could be said in this regard: Make sure your faith is alive.

### **Faith can be a dead thing**

This recommendation gives rise to a question: Can there be such a thing as a dead faith? Alas, yes; there can be a dead faith. It is clear that a denial of faith, whether objectively as when those truths

which we are obliged to hold by faith are denied or deliberately altered, or subjectively as when our adhesion to our creed becomes knowingly and willingly diminished, extinguishes faith and with it the vital supernatural light of divine revelation in our souls. But there is another degree of denial regarding the vitality of faith, and it is that which deprives faith itself of its connatural development, namely of Charity, grace. Sin which takes away grace from the soul may leave faith alive, but ineffective as far as communion with God is concerned, leaves it in a state of torpidity. Remember the words of St. Paul: "Fides quae operatur per caritatem". faith operating by means of charity (Gal.5,6).

The theologians tell us that charity is the fulfillment of faith, that is to say, gives Faith that full quality which makes it firm and directs it efficaciously towards its purpose, which is God, sought, desired, loved, possessed through love. Thus "charity is called the form of faith, insofar as through the medium of charity the act of faith is integrated and completed" (S. Th. II-II, 4, 3). And there is a third degree of denial which paralyzes and sterilizes faith, and that is the failure to express it by one's way of life, to profess it actively, to develop it in good works. It is the Apostle St. James who reminds us of this need, as though in tacit approval of the thesis that faith alone is sufficient for our salvation: "Faith without works is dead" (Jam. 2, 20).

### **Points of weakness in faith**

Then there is a long series of deficiencies which can militate against faith and deprive it of that vitality which should be aware of and should see that it has. We will not give the whole list, but We will invite an examination of conscience on some characteristic weak points in this matter of faith. The first is ignorance. Baptism has infused in us the virtue of faith, that is to say the capacity to possess faith and to profess it in regard to our own salvation and with supernatural merit. But clearly a virtue becomes atrophied if it is not exercised to the extent possible; and the first exercise of faith is getting to know the truths which form its object. This knowledge can have different phases which can be classified thus: from the acceptance of the christian message, the so-called "kerigma", to its natural development in catechetics, and

thence to profound theological investigation and contemplation. What is necessary to note for our practical purposes is the need for a serious and systematic knowledge of faith, and that is something which, alas, is wanting in to so very many, be they catholics or not. This is something intolerable in a society where culture has a pre-eminent place and where the facility for obtaining information is, one may say, within everyone's reach, it is sad to note, on the other hand, that generally speaking our people lack a clear and coherent, even if modest, knowledge of faith. Parochial catechism is largely abandoned; the religious teaching in our schools does not, one regrets to say, always fulfill its full purpose, before all else that of instilling into the pupils a reasoned conviction that their religion is the science of life. The book of religious culture is often neglected, often not to be found there, so that the knowledge of our faith is imperfect, defective, weak, feeble and exposed to the current objections which find easy prey amongst the widespread ignorance. Our answer to this is: *ne ignorata damnetur*, let our faith be not rejected because it is not known (cf. C. Colombo, *Theo. Culture of Clergy and Laity*; speech to the C. E. I. 1967).

### **The danger of human respect**

Another point of weakness is the well-known "human respect", that is to say reticence or shame or fear about professing, one's own faith. We are not talking about that discretion or reserve which, in a pluralistic and worldly society like ours, withholds from religious manifestations in front of others. We are talking about the weakness of disavowing one's own religious ideas from fear of ridicule, criticism, or reaction on the part of others. That was the notorious sad failure of St. Peter on the night when Jesus was taken prisoner. It is a frequent defect in boys, in youths, in opportunists, in people who lack character and courage. It is the reason, perhaps the principal one for abandonment of faith on the part of those who conform to any new environment in which they happen to find themselves.

We must say something in this context, about the power of environment into which one allows oneself to be integrated, a power which

impels masses of people to think and act in accordance with fashion, in accordance with the current prevailing opinion, in accordance with overwhelming forms of ideology which spread from time to time like irresistible epidemics. Environment, a most important factor in the formation of personality, often imposes itself as a need for conformity by which it is dominated. Social conformity is one of the forces which in certain cases sustains, in certain cases suffocates religious sense and practice. (cf. J. Leclercq, *Believing in Jesus Christ*, Casternan, 1967, pp. 105 ff.)

### **The Christian lives by faith**

Yet another point is worthy of special note, that namely of the union of faith with life, with the life of thought, with the life of action, with the life of feelings, with the spiritual and also temporal life. This is a point of highest importance. It is always being spoken of: *iustus ex fide vivit* (Gal. 3, 11); the christian, we may so translate, lives by faith, in accordance with his own faith. This is a principle, a standard, a force of christian living. To live with the faith and not by the faith is not enough; indeed this living with the faith can involve itself in a grave responsibility and in an accusation which the world often hurls against the man who calls himself a christian and does not live as christian. Let us think well on that.

We will stop there and ask ourselves again: What must we do to have a live faith? We can answer that trust in the teaching office of the Church, love of being orthodox in ideas about the faith, methodical and wise practice of one's religion, the example of good and courageous christians, personal and collective exercise in some work of the apostolate, these will help us to keep our faith alight and alive. Two observations we should keep in mind. The first of these makes us aware that faith must be for us a personal fact, a conscious act, willed and deep. This subjective element of faith is most important today; it has always been necessary, because it is part and parcel of the authentic act of faith, but often it has been and is still substituted for by tradition, by historic environment, by common custom. Today it is indispensable. Each one has to express in himself his personal faith with great aware-

ness and great energy. The second observation reminds us that faith has its local point in Jesus Christ (cf. Eph. 3, 17, S. Th. II-II, 16, 1, 1; III 62, 6). It is, we may say, a personal encounter with Him. He is the Master. He is the supreme point of revelation. He is the centre in which are united and from which radiate all religious truths necessary for our salvation. From Him the Church gets Her authority. In Him our faith finds joy and security, finds life. May it be so for all of you, with Our Apostolic Blessing.