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Bishop of Rapid City**

**Homily of the Opening Mass for the Year of Faith
Our Lady of Perpetual Help Cathedral**

October 14, 2012

My dear friends in Christ:

It is so good that we are here as we begin this great Year of Faith. What a tremendous gift our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI has given to the Church. This has the potential for being the most important year in your faith life. There is deep hunger in our hearts (at least I hope there is); there is a great yearning for something far greater than ourselves. Our hearts are restless because God has made us for himself. But how often do we forget this? How often do we fail to acknowledge or get in touch with this restlessness, this innate desire for God that is in our hearts? We all are in need of renewal and conversion. The Church is in need of renewal and conversion. The world is desperately in need of renewal and conversion.

As Pope Benedict states in Apostolic Letter on the Year of Faith, *Porta Fidei*: “*What the world is in particular need of today is the credible witness of people enlightened in mind and heart by the word of the Lord, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to the desire for God and for true life, life without end.*” [15]

The Holy Spirit has inspired the Holy Father to establish this Year of Faith. What this means for all of us is that the Holy Spirit of God, the indwelling love between the Father and Son, wants all of us to be renewed by encountering this Love. The Holy Spirit wants to renew the whole Church as each of us is renewed in our own faith and comes to a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ.

Pope Benedict chose October 11, 2012 as the opening date because on this day two important anniversaries occur: the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and the 20th anniversary of the promulgation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. As we begin this pilgrimage for the next 13 months, instead of our suitcase, our traveling bag, perhaps what is most necessary for this journey is the Word of God (the Sacred Scriptures), the documents of Vatican II, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. If these documents are not a part of your reading library, perhaps they could become your latest additions.

It is my hope that all of you, after taking this pilgrimage over these next 13 months, will become the “New Evangelists.” You will never have to fear defending your faith because these traveling documents will become your spiritual food and strength, as you gain wisdom and knowledge.

You will be able to say like we heard in the reading from Wisdom, “*I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her...*” [Wisdom 7:7-8]

But as we know, this Year of Faith is far more than studying these wonderful writings. The Year of Faith, as the Holy Father states, *“is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Savior of the world. In the mystery of his death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins.”* [6] It is about a renewed conversion to the Lord Jesus and to the rediscovery of our Catholic faith, so that all members of the Church will be credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord in the world of today.

So, as you can see, this Year of Faith is deeply connected to the New Evangelization and not about programs, new programs, revamping old programs. At the heart of it all, this Year of Faith is about seeking an encounter, an encounter with Jesus Christ, who will make all things new.

Pope Benedict shared with the young people in Madrid at World Youth Day last year these words, *“Faith is not the result of human effort, of human reasoning, but rather a gift of God. Faith starts with God, who opens his heart to us and invites us to share in his own divine life. Faith does not simply provide information about who Christ is; rather, it entails a personal relationship with Christ, a surrender of our whole person, with all our understanding, will and feelings, to God’s self-revelation.”*

My friends, this perhaps is the greatest challenge of all for disciples, to make a personal decision in this regard. Faith in Christ and discipleship are firmly interconnected. For each of us, this is answering a call to holiness. This is saying, “Yes, Lord, I want you to be the Master of my life.”

Since faith involves following the Master, it will become stronger, deeper and more mature, to the extent that it leads to a closer and more intense relationship with Jesus. All of the disciples of Jesus had to grow in this way, until their encounter with the Risen Lord opened their eyes to the fullness of faith. Why would it be any different for you and me?

The Lord is so near to us! St. Augustine said, *“God is closer to me than I am to myself.”* Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received from this intimacy with Jesus, and when it is communicated as an experience of the grace and joy we have received. *“It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to his word and become his disciples.”*[7]

As we begin this year of Faith, we too pray like the psalmist, **“Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy!” This is our song. This is the song on our lips.**

The churches all across our lands and world are half filled or empty. Many people say that they have no trouble believing but do not want to belong to a church. This viewpoint doesn’t make sense for us who believe in the Body of Christ. Jesus and his Church are one. He is the Head and we are the Body. When we become those credible and joy-filled witnesses to the Risen Lord, this is the true message to be proclaimed. This is the message that Christ has left us. The renewal of the Church is achieved through the witness offered by the lives of believers. By their very existence in the world, you and I are called to radiate the word of truth that the Lord Jesus has left us. The call to evangelize is at the heart of discipleship. It is at the heart of the Year of Faith.

We see also that many people, while not claiming to have the gift of faith, are still searching for the ultimate meaning and for truth of their lives and of the world.

As the Holy Father says, *“This search is an authentic “preamble” to the faith, because it guides people onto the path that leads to the mystery of God.”* [10] Because of our faith, you and I can help them, if we have the courage to be a true disciple.

Jesus, during these next 13 months, wants to set our hearts on fire. He wants to ignite His fire of love within us in a very personal way. Jesus wants to show us intimately why He came, suffered, and died. He wants to lead each of us to the Father’s heart.

During this Year of Faith how will this take place? Here are four ways among many.

1. Intensified prayer in each of our lives; opening our hearts to this relationship in daily quiet prayer. ***“To realize a profound and fruitful prayer requires perseverance in patience, in pure naked faith; to remain alone with God in loving and peaceful attention, in calm and quiet. God will do the rest.”*** [Father Ignacio Larranaga]
2. **As we said earlier, our texts for the journey are the Sacred Scripture, the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Prayer and study of these documents is our food for the journey. As Pope Benedict has said** *“To rediscover the content of the faith that is professed, celebrated, lived and prayed, and to reflect on the act of faith, is a task that every believer must make his own, especially in the course of this Year.”* [15] *“Knowledge of faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God. The giving of assent implies that, when we believe, we freely accept the whole mystery of faith, because the guarantor of its truth is God who reveals himself and allows us to know his mystery of love.”* [10] You can do this on your own, as a married couple, or as a family, either at home or with others in your parishes. Take advantage of the talks given throughout the Diocese. Make use of the Year of Faith website connected to the Diocese of Rapid City website.
3. Become renewed in both understanding and practice of the sacraments of our faith, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. In each sacrament, what is presented is no theory, but a personal, intimate encounter with *“a Person who lives within the Church [Jesus Christ himself]. The profession of faith is followed by an account of sacramental life, in which Christ is present, operative and continues to build his Church. Without the liturgy and the sacraments, the profession of faith would lack efficacy, because it would lack the grace which supports Christian witness.”* [11] It is this grace of the sacraments which sustain us for discipleship and ministry. It is this grace that reveals to us the mystery of Christ’s love for us.
4. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes. It calls us to be a living sign of Christ’s presence in the world. *“The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one’s faith fearlessly to every person. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us fit for mission and strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous.”* [10]

As we heard in the Gospel, Jesus said, *“Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, “Then who can be saved?” Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings it is impossible, but not for God.”* [Mark 10:24, 26-27]

So we see that a deeper life in faith is impossible for us to attain on our own. But if we surrender our lives in faithful trust and desire, and our choices during this Year of Faith reflect this, all of us will walk through “the door of faith,” *porta fidei*, into the kingdom of God in ways we cannot yet imagine.

In the words of our Holy Father, “*The "door of faith" (Acts 14:27) is always open for us, ushering us into the life of communion with God and offering entry into his Church. It is possible to cross that threshold when the word of God is proclaimed and the heart allows itself to be shaped by transforming grace. To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts [not just 13 months, but] a lifetime.*”[1]

Mary is our great model for faith. As Mary “*kept all these things, pondering them in her heart*” [Luke 2:19], she entrusted herself completely in the hands of God. Therefore, we entrust this Year of Faith in the Diocese of Rapid City to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, praying that Mary, our Mother will be this shining star along our way of the new evangelization.

God bless all of you.