



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 21 November 2012

Year of Faith. The reasonableness of faith in God

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let us proceed in this Year of Faith bearing in our hearts the hope of finding all the joy there is in believing and of rediscovering the enthusiasm of communicating the truths of the faith to all. These truths are not a simple message about God, a particular piece of information on him. On the contrary they express the event of God's encounter with human beings, a salvific and liberating encounter which fulfils the deepest aspirations of the human heart, the yearning for peace, brotherhood and love. Faith leads to the discovery that the meeting with God enhances, perfects and exalts all that is true, good and beautiful that exists in man. So it happens that while God reveals himself and lets himself be known, man comes to realize who God is and in knowing him, discovers himself, his true origin, his destiny, the greatness and dignity of human life.

Faith makes possible authentic knowledge about God which involves the whole human person: it is a "sapere", that is, a knowledge which gives life a savour, a new taste, a joyful way of being in the world. Faith is expressed in the gift of self for others, in brotherhood which creates solidarity, the ability to love, overcoming the loneliness that brings sadness. Thus this knowledge of God through faith is not only intellectual but also vital. It is the knowledge of God-Love, thanks to his own love. The love of God, moreover, makes us see, opens our eyes, enables us to know the whole of reality, in addition to the narrow views of individualism and subjectivism that confuse

consciences. Knowledge of God is therefore an experience of faith and at the same time entails an intellectual and moral development; moved in our depths by the Spirit of Jesus within us, we go beyond the horizons of our own selfishness and open ourselves to the true values of existence.

Today, in this catechesis, I would like to reflect on the reasonableness of faith in God. The Catholic Tradition, from the outset, rejected the so-called “fideism”, which is the desire to believe against reason. *Credo quia absurdum* (I believe because it is absurd) is not a formula that interprets the Catholic faith. Indeed God is not absurd, if anything he is a mystery. The mystery, in its turn, is not irrational but is a superabundance of sense, of meaning, of truth. If, looking at the mystery, reason sees darkness, it is not because there is no light in the mystery, but rather because there is too much of it. Just as when humans raise their eyes to look at the sun, they are blinded; but who would say that the sun is not bright or, indeed, the fount of light? Faith permits us to look at the “sun”, God, because it is the acceptance of his revelation in history and, so to speak, the true reception of God’s mystery, recognizing the great miracle. God came close to man, he offered himself so that man might know him, stooping to the creatural limitations of human reason (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution, *Dei Verbum*, n. 13). At the same time, God, with his grace, illuminates reason, unfolds new horizons before it, boundless and infinite. For this reason faith is an incentive to seek always, never to stop and never to be content in the inexhaustible search for truth and reality. The prejudice of certain modern thinkers, who hold that human reason would be as it were blocked by the dogmas of faith, is false.

Exactly the opposite is true, as the great teachers of the Catholic Tradition have shown. St Augustine, before his conversion sought the Truth with great restlessness through all the philosophies he had at his disposal, finding them all unsatisfactory. His demanding, rational search, was a meaningful pedagogy for him for the encounter with the Truth of Christ. When he says: “I believe, in order to understand, and I understand the better to believe” (*Discourse 43, 9: PL 38, 258*), it is as if he were recounting his own life experience. Intellect and faith are not foreign or antagonistic to the divine Revelation but are both conditions for understanding its meaning, for receiving its authentic message, for approaching the threshold of the mystery. St Augustine, together with so many other Christian authors, is a witness of a faith that is practised with reason, that thinks and invites thought. On this same track St Anselm was to say in his *Proslogion* that the Catholic faith is a *fides quaerens intellectum*, where the quest for understanding is an act inherent to believing. It was to be St Thomas Aquinas in particular — strong in this tradition — who challenged the reason of the philosophers, showing how much new and fertile rational vitality comes from human thought grafted on to the principles and truths of the Christian faith.

The Catholic faith is therefore reasonable and fosters trust in human reason as well. The First Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, said that reason is able to know with certainty that God exists through the Creation, whereas the possibility of knowing “easily, with complete certainty and without error” (DS 3005) the truths that concern God in the light of grace,

belongs to faith alone. The knowledge of faith, moreover, is not in opposition to right reason. Blessed Pope John Paul II, in fact, in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, sums it up in these words: “human reason is neither annulled nor debased in assenting to the contents of faith, which are in any case attained by way of free and informed choice” (n. 43).

In the irresistible desire for truth, only a harmonious relationship between faith and reason is the right road that leads to God and to the person’s complete fulfilment. This doctrine is easily recognizable throughout the New Testament. St Paul, in writing to the Christians of Corinth, maintains, as we have heard: “Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:22-23). God in fact did not save the world with an act of power, but through the humiliation of his Only-Begotten Son. Measured in human parameters, the unusual ways of God clash with the demands of Greek wisdom. And yet, the Cross of Christ has a reason of its own which St Paul calls: *ho logos tou staurou* “the word of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18). Here the term *logos* means both the word and reason and, if it alludes to the word, it is because it expresses verbally what reason works out.

Hence Paul does not see the Cross as an irrational event, but as a saving factor that possesses its own reasonableness, recognizable in the light of faith. At the same time he has such trust in human reason, that he is surprised that many people, in spite of seeing the works brought about by God, persist in refusing to believe in him. In his Letter to the Romans St Paul says: “ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” (1:20).

St Peter likewise also urges the Christians of the diaspora to worship: “in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pt 3:15). In an atmosphere of persecution and with a pressing need to bear witness to faith, we believers are asked to justify with well-grounded reasons their adherence to the word of the Gospel, to account for the reason for our hope.

The virtual relationship between science and faith is also founded on these premises concerning the fertile connection between understanding and believing. Scientific research leads to the knowledge of ever new truths about man and about the cosmos, as we see it. The true good of humanity, accessible in faith, unfolds the horizons within which the process of its discovery must move. Consequently research, for example, at the service of life and which aims to eliminate disease, should be encouraged. Also important are investigations that aim to discover the secrets of our planet and of the universe, in the awareness that the human being is not in charge of creation to exploit it foolishly but to preserve it and make it inhabitable. Thus faith, lived truly, does not come into conflict with science but, rather, cooperates with it, offering the basic criteria to promote the good of all and asking it to give up only those endeavours which — in opposition to God’s original plan — produce effects that are detrimental to the human being. For this reason too it is reasonable to believe: if science is a precious ally of faith for understanding God’s plan for the

universe, faith, remaining faithful to this very plan, permits scientific progress always to be achieved for the good and truth of man.

This is why it is crucial for human beings to be open to faith and to know God and his plan of salvation in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel a new humanism is inaugurated, an authentic “grammar” of the human being and of the whole of reality. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “God's truth is his wisdom, which commands the whole created order and governs the world. God, who alone ‘made heaven and earth’ (Ps 115:15), can alone impart true knowledge of every created thing in relation to himself” (n. 216).

Let us trust, therefore, that our commitment to evangelization may help to restore a new centrality to the Gospel in the life of untold men and women of our time. And let us pray that all may rediscover in Christ the meaning of existence and the foundation of true freedom: without God, in fact, men and women lose themselves. The testimonies of those who have preceded us and dedicated their lives to the Gospel confirm this for ever. It is reasonable to believe, and the whole of our existence is at stake. It is worth expending oneself for Christ, he alone satisfies the desires for truth and goodness that are rooted in every human being's soul: now, in time that passes, and in the never ending day of blessed Eternity.

To special groups:

I offer a cordial greeting to the participants in the conference on Catholic and Muslim cooperation in promoting justice in the contemporary world. I also greet the group from CAFOD, with gratitude for the Agency's 50 years of charitable activity on behalf of the Church in England and Wales. Upon all present at today's Audience, including those from England, Sri Lanka and the United States, I invoke God's blessings! Thank you.

I now greet with affection the *sick*, the *newlyweds* and the *young people*, especially the students of Beata Maria Cristina Brando School in Casoria. Next Sunday, the last in Ordinary Time, we shall celebrate the Solemnity of Christ the King. Dear *young people*, put Jesus at the centre of your life, and you will receive light and courage from him in every daily decision. May Christ, who made the Cross a royal throne, teach you, dear *sick people*, to understand the redemptive value of suffering lived in union with him. I hope that you, dear *newlyweds*, may recognize the Lord's presence on your journey as a married couple, so as to share in building his Kingdom of love and peace.

Today, the liturgical Memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple, we are celebrating the Day of Cloistered Religious Life. I would like to assure the Sisters called by the Lord to contemplative life of my own special closeness and that of the entire ecclesial community. At the same time, I renew my invitation to all Christians not to let cloistered monasteries lack spiritual and material support. We are so indebted, in fact, to these people who have consecrated

themselves without reserve to prayer for the Church and for the world! Many thanks.

APPEAL

I am following with serious concern the escalating violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. Bearing both the victims and those who are suffering in prayerful remembrance, I feel it is my duty to state once again that hatred and violence are never a solution to problems. Moreover, I encourage the initiatives and efforts of all those who are seeking to obtain a truce and to further negotiations. I also urge all the Authorities of both Parties to make courageous decisions for peace and to put an end to this conflict that is causing such negative repercussions throughout the Middle East, persecuted by so many clashes and in need of peace and reconciliation.

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