



Seton Home Study School

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Presentation of the Blessed Virgin

On November 21, we celebrate the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the occasion when Saint Anne and Saint Joachim presented their daughter to Zachary, the high priest in the Jerusalem Temple.

This occasion was not simply a “presentation” as we understand the word today, but rather it was the official entrance of Mary, at only three years old and at her own request, into the Temple, where she was to live a life of dedication to God in continuous prayer, similar to convent life today.

Mary’s parents were obedient to an extraordinary request from God and from Mary to allow the Temple teachers to oversee the formation of Mary because of her singular role in salvation history. Her role and her sinless condition meant she needed a very special formation.

From the teachings of the Bible and the Church, we know that God has always asked parents to take a very active role in the education of their children. Historically and certainly today, the government schools either work completely against Faith and virtue, or are very weak in their formation, however fine they may be in transmitting certain knowledge and skills.

We homeschooling parents can see this event as reminding us of the importance of teaching our children from their very young age about God, the Holy Family, and whatever teachings about the Faith they can understand.

The Presentation of Mary also reminds us that the best way to teach

our children is by example. Certainly, the sinless Mary was ready and able to learn important truths about God from her parents at a very young age because she was free from sin. Our children, because of original sin, need a longer formation in the family. The family is the school of faith and virtue today. As difficult as our current American culture makes it to even be a Christian family, there is no alternative.

If the traditional Christian family is lacking or fails, it is impossible that any other entity could do better, or remedy the problems of children. Our children will be more accepting of Catholic teachings if they are taught to be obedient to their parents as they see their parents’ own obedience and practice of the Faith.

It is likely that there were those besides Saints Anne and Joachim who recognized Mary as the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy of the Messiah. Zachary, the high priest, had known Mary’s parents for some time. The Eastern Rite liturgical prayers include these words: “Zachary had this to say to Mary: ‘O Door of the Lord, to you I open the doors of the Temple. Enter with joy, for I know and I believe that the salvation of Israel will come now, and from you will be born the Word of God, who grants great mercy to the world.’”

Various Eastern Rite prayers remark that the future pure Temple or Tabernacle of the Messiah was herself entering the Temple of the Lord. “O Faithful, let us exchange glad tidings today, singing psalms to the Lord and hymns of praise

in honor of Mary, His Mother, His holy Tabernacle, the Ark that contained the Word, whom nothing can contain.”

“Today, the living Temple of the holy glory of Christ our God, Mary, the pure and blessed one, is presented in the Temple of Moses to live in its holy precincts.”

“The most praiseworthy Anne cries out in great joy to Zachary, the high priest: Come receive joyfully the one whom the Prophets of God announced by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Introduce her into the holy Temple that she may be brought up in purity, to become the Throne of God, a palace, a place of delight to the Lord of us all.”

O Blessed Virgin Mary, as we celebrate and consider the occasion of your Presentation in the Temple by your parents, help us homeschooling parents to realize the importance of bringing up our children, especially our very young children, with our own good example of being obedient to the teachings of Jesus and His Church.

Holy Virgin, presented in childhood in the Temple, pray for us.

- MKC

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Questions We Are Asked

by Dr. Mary Kay Clark
Director, Seton Home Study School

How can I stay on top of things during the year when I am homeschooling?

Being organized is difficult, as most homeschooling moms will readily admit. However, there are some parents who have worked at it over the years, and have good control over the homeschooling and homemaking. There are several ways to find good ideas that might help you. Read some of the chapters in my book, *Catholic Home Schooling*, especially on discipline and home management. Read Ginny Seuffert's book *Home Management Essentials*. Read some of the articles appearing in our past newsletters regarding home organization. Purchase one of our blank lesson plan books and use it to organize and schedule your own home management, appointments, and inside and outside tasks. Look on the Internet for tons of ideas about organizing your home.

If I were to give one major tip, it is this: that you need to see yourself as the manager not only of your home and homeschooling, but of your children, who need to be considered as your best resources for making home life run more smoothly. You might think that your children are the first to cause clutter and confusion, but you need to realize that they are the first you need to train to pick up, get organized, and get them scheduled for chores and homeschooling.

If you have trouble training your children, find some well-organized friends and see how they train and discipline their children. Your biggest problem will be to stick with it, to discipline yourself to stick with it. Have a few rules, such as dinner does not get cooked until certain chores are accomplished.

It takes a good deal of effort and self-discipline if things have been out

of control for very long. It might take a few months of stern control, but eventually, things can and will change, especially if you, your husband, and your children pray together for the home to become more of a pleasant hearth than a junk yard!

My older children seem to need more help in math than I can give them, but I just can't afford the video CDs.

The tutoring CDs are really great because they are written specifically for the Saxon math book lessons. Moms think these discs are terrific because the student can look at the lessons on the computer and replay them as many times as they need to learn the lesson. If you cannot afford to buy them from Seton, ask other homeschooling families if they would be willing to sell or loan their copies to you for a year. Consider asking the children's grandparents to purchase a disk for a birthday present.

Don't forget the power of prayer. Have your children start each day, and especially before math class, with a prayer to their patron saint for help in understanding the math lessons.

It seems like all the families we know are involved in scores of activities for their children. I feel like it's too much, but I hate to disappoint my kids.

There is much more emphasis today on organized activities for children than when I was homeschooling. It's not unusual for a child to be on a soccer team, take music or dance lessons, and be in a drama club all at the same time. For older kids, throw in a part-time job. When you multiply this by several children, it can become completely overwhelming. Families have to buy giant wall calendars just to have enough space to write everything down for each day.

When I was raising my kids, children played in the backyard and around the neighborhood. My husband and I grew up in years when money was hard to come by, during wartime and after wartime. In the past twenty years, money for organized sports and classes has been easier to find, but recently the economic situation has caused families to stay home more.

Nevertheless, if you want your children to focus on home and education first, you could set some rules, such as allowing the children to take only one extracurricular activity

If you have trouble training your children, find some well-organized friends and see how they train their children.

at a time as long as they do their daily homeschooling at a pace and level that you consider appropriate.

Continue reminding your children, especially as you read the lives of the saints, what is important in our daily lives. Our learning and practice of the Faith is the most important. Our children should not have so many outside activities that it interferes with attending Mass, saying our daily Rosary, and attending liturgical and other events at church.

Why can my children not choose their own topics for the book reports?

At the elementary level, Seton chooses the topics for the middle paragraphs for the first two books the students read. For the second two books—stories of the saints—the students can choose the topics. We need to give the students the topics in the first two quarters to give them the experience of gathering facts from the book to prove a certain statement. If the students choose their own topic as a first book report assignment, it may not be a primary topic, and the

students may have difficulty proving the topic with good examples.

At the high school level, the books are more involved and complex. By providing a major topic for the students, Seton helps in focusing and finding relevant examples or arguments to prove a thesis. In many cases, for the high school reports, the students have a selection of topics.

My children are a little behind. Should I continue homeschooling during the holiday season?

Instead of trying to change the boy, try changing how you homeschool.

Seton does not have any recommendation about homeschooling during the holidays, but we know that many families do continue home schooling during part of the holidays. Important in the decision is whether or not the student has been keeping up with his studies. Many parents are not willing to start January with students having fallen behind in their lessons.

Some families have students do homeschooling on Saturdays for any lessons not completed during the week. When offered the choice of Saturday classes or doing homeschooling during the summer or on holidays, many students work more efficiently during regular class times.

What is your redo policy for Algebra?

We have noticed recently that some students are struggling with Algebra I and Algebra II. When we investigated through our computer system, we found that most of these students were redoing many of their Algebra tests, but redoing only the missed problems, and not doing much better. Therefore, we are starting a new policy for Algebra I and Algebra II students.

Our new policy is that students who want to redo an Algebra test must take a different test with different

problems for the same chapter lessons. The student must show on paper the work for each problem. By seeing how the student worked out the answer, our graders can determine what the difficulty is and help the student focus on re-studying certain concepts. We hope that by giving students more help early, we can avoid the situation where the student fails test after test and never really understands the basic concepts.

My daughter learned to read at four years old. Can she skip kindergarten?

We don't encourage skipping a grade level. While a child may advance one year, she may not advance, and may even fall back a little, in the next grade level. Except for arithmetic, which includes review of basic concepts even in more advanced math, we encourage parents to advance their child grade level by grade level, just to make sure that concepts are being learned and—more importantly at the very early levels—that concepts are being retained. Going over phonics lessons, for instance, even if it is just review in first grade, or second grade, or third grade, is extremely important so that the concepts become automatic for the reading process. There is no damage done by more review, but often, when concepts are not repeated and ingrained with daily review, concepts can be, and often are, forgotten.

It can cause unhappiness and frustration if a child skips a grade and then needs to be put back. Better to be slow and sure and solid.

Do you have any suggestions for my son in third grade who has attention problems?

If you take a survey of third grade teachers, most would say that there are always boys in their classroom who have attention problems. However, it is not so much attention problems as the fact that God made young children, especially boys, to be active. Activity is important for physical and mental growth at any age, but especially for young children.

Instead of trying to change the boy, try changing how you homeschool. Give assignments in smaller segments, perhaps fifteen minutes of writing

interspersed with oral or active work. Students can read while they walk around, and can even memorize their spelling words or math facts jumping rope!

Discuss the daily schedule with your child, so that he is a part of the decision-making process. He is more likely to be willing to do his work when he has a part in designing it.

Students are more attentive in the morning, so schedule the subjects which are more difficult for your son in the morning, and the easier ones in the afternoon.

Use a blackboard or white board. Young children like the physical activity of large writing on a board. Use this for spelling, phonics, math, diagrams, vocabulary words, rhyming words, and so on.

Be sure to move ahead more quickly in the subjects he is learning more quickly. Give him an incentive with educational board games, card games, and computer games.

Reward your child with work well done or done in a timely manner. I paid one of my sons for reading each book in a saints series, and he read all the books in record time and became our household expert on the saints. And an excellent reader and thinker!

Should I phone an academic counselor every time I have a question?

You may phone if you want. Or, if you prefer, you can email, or check the Message Board. When you are having problems, don't hesitate to contact us in some way. One of the comments I often hear from our counselors is "Why do people wait so long before they phone for help? We could save them so much time and trouble if they call when they first have problems."

Remember, most of your questions and concerns are not new. Our counselors have heard them before, and they often have ready answers. Please don't feel that you are bothering the counselors or that you ought to suffer through in silence. We maintain our counseling staff in order to help parents, and we are always very happy to hear from you.

Transitions

by John Clark

Philomena (10) and Dominica (8) recently began playing in a girls' softball league. Before one of their games, I took a bucket of balls and began to pitch to them to prepare them to hit. Seeing that I was willing to help, the head coach asked if I could stay and coach first base. Having coached baseball at a number of levels, I figured that softball was pretty similar. To the uninitiated, it might seem that baseball and softball are almost exactly the same. They aren't. There are three bases and home plate. That's where most of the similarity ends. Sure, the smaller fields and the underhand pitching are obvious differences, but there are more subtle ones as well.

Baseball has its own language. For instance, a short fly ball is called a "can of corn." A batted baseball that is easy to field is called a "room service" grounder. The slang words for home run include: "going yard," "Jack," or "bomb." Softball has an entirely different lexicon. After a line drive over her head, one of the girls said, "If it were a snake, it would have bit me," which I was told meant that the ball came very close to her. Baseball has one or two chants—things like "Hey, batta, batta, batta...swing batta." Softball has so many chants that—even though the girls shout them pretty constantly—after five or six games, the girls have rarely repeated themselves.

Coaching styles that proved effective at the college level don't translate well to 8-year-old softball players. At the college level, you can tell your players: "If you don't start taking this game seriously, maybe we should all go home!" But it's hard to say these words to someone who is wearing a pink batting helmet with a pony tail coming out the back. So instead, you find yourself saying things like: "Try to take a little lead off of first base after the pitch, *Honey*," or "You can steal second base now if you want, but if you don't want to, that's OK, too."

Baseball is fun, but it's the kind of fun like the feeling of accomplishment

after a difficult task is fun. Softball is fun like a kid's birthday party. And at times, I'm not sure it *isn't* a birthday party. For example, at last week's game, Philomena and Dominica each told me: "Daddy, it was fun running to first base; but it was even more fun because you were there when I got there." I don't remember my sons ever telling me that (although they would have probably regarded taking only one base as a failure).

If a sport were judged by its camaraderie, softball wins hands down. The 2011 Major League Baseball Official Rule 3.09 reads: "Players of opposing teams shall not fraternize at any time while in uniform." This rule does not seem to have filtered down to girls' softball. In fact, after each game, all the players from both teams gather at the pitcher's mound and shout out a poem:

We're all for one!
We're one for all!
Together we stand!
Together we fall!
And in the end!
We win them all!

Not that they don't take it seriously—they do. In fact, after a game that saw Dominica and Philomena get their first hits of the year, we went out to celebrate at a fancy restaurant (at least by Front Royal standards). As we ate dinner, we noticed that there was a television that was showing the World Series. As one of the batters for the Texas Rangers came to the plate, Dominica asked me, "Daddy, am I a better player than that guy?"

"Not yet, Dominica," I answered, "but he's had a lot more practice than you."

I think that in the back of their minds, they are open to the possibility of being the first two women major leaguers in history.

Sometime between trying to

memorize the softball chants and walking to the concession stand (or, as Dominica calls it, the "Confession stand") for Ring Pops, something dawned on me. I didn't expect to like being an assistant softball coach. But after a few games, I'm hooked. It's just one in a long line of activities that my children have liked first, and that I have liked as a result.

And I guess in a way, that's an extension of the homeschooling process. The homeschooling mindset broadens your horizons to include all those things that interest your children. Your field of vision becomes more vast because it spurs you to learn about those things that your children love. Even the academic subjects come alive once again for us homeschooling parents. As a friend of mine recently commented, communicating history, philosophy, mathematics, theology, and even grammar facts to our children can be *fun*. Sometimes it's *birthday party fun* and sometimes it's *rewarding fun*. But done properly, it is fun. I like helping my children learn; I like discovering what interests them, whether it's science or softball. This process also allows you to transition yourself into a better father.

Transitions make many people uncomfortable, but they are often a chance to better yourself. I always had the most respect for the coaches who were willing to adapt to their players, instead of forcing the players to adapt to them. Bill Parcels, the former coach of the New York Giants, was a good example of that principle. He coached the players he *had*—not the players he didn't have. Coaching like this sounds obvious, except for the fact that many coaches never make good transitions, and sadly, many of them don't even try. Regardless of the players, they insist on doing it their way. But coaches who insist on "their way or the highway" soon find themselves hitchhiking.

Fatherhood is a lot like coaching. You always retain the important ethical principles, but you adapt your fathering style to your particular child.

I can't wait to see what they will like next—and to see what *I'll* like next.

*Classics for the Young:
Junior High Literature
by Dr. Mitchell Kalpakgian*

Simone Weil, a noted Jewish philosopher, remarked, “Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating.” Whereas many Hollywood films offer this imaginary glamour of evil and dullness of virtue, Hans Christian Andersen’s genius as a storyteller captures the glorious, adventurous drama of a real life of goodness that is filled with wonder and marvels. In stories like “The Little Mermaid,” “The Snow Queen,” and “The Traveling Companion,” Andersen captures the essence of goodness as a small seed buried in the earth—a seed that in time produces a bountiful harvest that surpasses all expectations. The doer of a good deed should forget it, but it is not forgotten because it accompanies him like a best friend.

In “The Traveling Companion” John suffers the loss of his beloved father and finds himself alone in the world with only \$50. Unsure of his future, he begins to seek his fortune and sets off on a journey, promising “I will always try to be good! . . . Then I shall go to heaven, too, and be with father.”

In his travels, he visits a churchyard with many graves in a state of neglect covered by the long grass. Alone in the graveyard he voluntarily pulls the grass, places the fallen crosses in a proper position, and rearranges the wreaths with the hope that someone would care for his own father’s grave during his absence. In other words, John does good quietly and anonymously, loving goodness for its own sake without any thought of reward or recognition. In the words of the proverb, “Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame.”

When John takes shelter in a church during a rainstorm in the

night, he finds an open coffin with a body awaiting burial. Two men enter the church to desecrate the body out of revenge. Because the dead man failed to pay his debts to the two rogues, they will wreak their vengeance: “So we intend to get our own back on him—he shall lie like a dog outside the church door.”

Remembering his promise always to do good, John parts with his last \$50 to pay the dead man’s debts and satisfy the anger of his creditors. Once again, poor John gives without expecting to receive as he performs his good deed in the silence of the night and in the darkness of the church, offering money to two strangers who will never even express gratitude. Poor John always acts with a pure heart and has no ulterior motives.

When his journey resumes, poor John encounters a fellow traveler—“the traveling companion”—and the two of them together perform more of these good deeds along the way for strangers they do not ever expect to see again, good deeds that carry with them no reward. Together they heal the broken leg of an old woman with a magical ointment and accept only three bundles of sticks she carries in her apron. At an inn, they repair with the ointment a puppet attacked by a dog that bit off the head, and the two travelers accept from the puppet master a great saber. As they climb up high mountains, they witness a swan falling to its death, and the traveling companion cuts off the wings.

With the sticks, the saber, and the wings—none of them prizes of great value—the two travelers enter a city and behold the king’s daughter passing, a princess notorious for her wickedness who betrays her suitors in a guessing game: “From every tree hung three or four king’s sons who had wooed the princess but had not

been able to guess the things she had asked them.” When John sees the beautiful princess, he remembers her from a dream: “for the princess looked exactly like the lovely girl with the golden crown he had dreamt of the night his father died.”

Determined to win his bride by playing the dangerous guessing game despite the dead bodies of other suitors who failed in the contest hanging from the trees, poor John—with the help of his traveling companion using the sticks, saber, and wings—answers correctly each time the princess asks her suitor to guess her thoughts. The traveling companion provides supernatural assistance (grace) that provides the right answers and disenchant the spell of the troll that has transformed the princess into an evil woman. When poor John decides to win the hand of the princess or die, he entrusts his life to Divine Providence: “For I’ve always believed Our Lord would help me.”

When poor John and the Traveling Companion say farewell and go their separate ways, John offers his heartfelt gratitude, but his friend only replies: “I have only paid my debt. Do you remember the dead man those wicked men wanted to harm? You gave all you had so that he could lie quietly in his grave. I am that dead man.” A good deed is a traveling companion. A good deed is like a buried seed. If it appears to go unnoticed or forgotten, if a good deed is done in stealth at night or in a graveyard, or if it happened a long time ago in the past, it is never dead, unacknowledged, or lost. A good deed accompanies a person wherever he goes. A good deed is always fruitful. John’s simple good deed in a lonely church produced the bountiful harvest of a happy marriage to the beautiful princess. The life of goodness is a glorious adventure filled with surprises and mysteries that make it “new, marvelous, intoxicating” as Simone Weil noted—not boring.

Cultural Heroes

by Dr. William Marra

The following is a brief part of a speech the late Dr. William Marra gave in Toronto in 1993.

In homeschooling, aim at a certain academic excellence. I claim that is the bonus that is always thrown in. If you seek first to defer harm, if secondly you permeate the situation with a Catholic atmosphere, the easiest part is the academic subjects.

Those few people who are destined to be the cultural leaders will have a far better preparation homeschooled than they will going to the most prestigious, expensive private school around.

When Catholic culture naturally exists, formal education is almost superfluous. The citizens of that culture, from the babe in arms up to the oldest man, will gain strength and light and solidarity as it were, through a spiritual osmosis: the very stones of the street, the very Stations of the Cross at the crosswalks, the very names of the cities, the very fact that we say “on St. Michael’s Day, we are going to do this,” instead of saying “on September 29th.”

When you start using the saints as your chronology, illustrations from the Bible and the lives of the saints, when Joan of Arc is a topic among you, and not some rock star—that is Catholic culture.

The beauty of Catholic culture is that when you practice it, you don’t have to articulate your

Faith—you live it. That is where we get the great treasures of Western Civilization, such as music, the fine arts, architecture, without any great effort on our part, because these accompany Catholic culture when it is authentic.

Catholic culture is the cause of the wonderful harmony and the high level of civilization that was enjoyed in the past. There is no such culture today.

Today we have small homeschools. Because there is no existing Catholic culture, Catholic families must work to create it. Thanks to Christ-centered homeschooling, these children, born into this barren culture, will be the future heroes. These heroes will have a dedication to Truth.

These homeschooled heroes will understand who Christ is,

what Truth is, what the Church is, who the enemies of the Church are.

Some of these heroes are going to swear a vow to be holy, and they will mean it. These homeschooled heroes will reject our secular materialistic world and all its vices. These homeschooled heroes will understand that life on Earth is a pilgrimage. Some of these homeschooled heroes will be dedicated to a zealous pursuit of the Truth, no matter what it costs them in study, dispute, or controversy.

Because of their dedication and formation in homeschooling, parents will give us the young people who will be the heroes of sanctity in the first place, and the heroes of Catholic culture in the second place.

It is these homeschooled heroes who will make the cultural barren desert bloom once again.

Seton Graduation 2012

Seton Home Study School is pleased to announce that the speaker for our 2012 high school graduation will be Johnnette Benkovic. Johnnette is widely-known from her frequent appearances on EWTN, including hosting *The Abundant Life* and *Women of Grace*. She is a frequent speaker at women’s conferences and retreats around the country. We know that our families will appreciate her message of inspiration and grace.



The Seton 2012 High School Graduation will be held in Front Royal, VA, on the campus of Christendom College on Saturday, May 26th, at 2:00 pm. More information will be posted online and also mailed to 12th grade students in January of 2012.

Letter from a Graduate

Dr. Clark,

I hope you don't mind that I'm emailing you directly, but I wanted to reach out to you, as head of Seton, to tell you a little bit about my own experiences with the program, and what I am up to now.

I was a high school student in the Seton program in the early 1990s, after attending a private Catholic elementary school that my mother had founded, in Derby, a small community 20 miles south of Buffalo on Lake Erie. I persuaded my parents to let me try Seton for my high school education because the high schools that I tried attending — two at least, including one I had a full scholarship to — just did not feel like a good fit. I worked hard in the Seton program, doing my high school education in about 3-3.5 years, and doing much of it in a self-directed, self-motivated way.

I noticed that in a recent edition of the Seton newsletter you answered a question about whether home-schooled high school students do worse in college — that amused me, because I would argue that the exact reverse is true! As a home-schooler who knew the meaning of discipline and deadlines, I excelled in college, graduating with two bachelor's degrees from Canisius College's prestigious All-College Honors Program, and with a grade

point average of a few tenths-of-a-percentage point under 4.0. I delivered the commencement address at my college's graduation, before thousands of people.

In graduate school, I earned an MA in English in 2000, followed by my doctorate in English in 2004. My Ph.D dissertation included a study of 19th-century American literature and art that closely examined a subgenre of the literature that I call "convent fiction": stories and novels about convents and religious women written in the 18th and 19th centuries. My research was awarded a grant from Notre Dame University, which allowed me to do work in the university's library collections in Roman Catholicism and religious orders in the United States — a fascinating subject, and one I still hope to explore at length.

During the years since college, I have worked professionally as a writer and journalist. I have worked for a major metropolitan daily newspaper for 14 years, as a feature-writer, news reporter, columnist, and team leader. I have won numerous awards for my journalism, including two awards from the New York State Publishers' Association for public service journalism — a trademark of my work that I am particularly proud of. Some of my best work has centered around children and poverty.

I am now in the final stages of completing a book that will be published by Cornell University Press within the next two years; it is a full-length, nonfiction narrative account of the "Angola Horror," a little-known train wreck that happened in upstate New York in the 1860s, and that has since been forgotten. This wreck, my book will show, changed American transportation history in important ways.

Most importantly, my husband and I have two little girls, and we are now using the Seton program to home-school them. Both are flourishing under the program. They have extensive vocabularies, read voraciously, and know their phonics, mathematics, and catechism to the last detail. Our girls look forward to school as the best part of each day.

My research and writing interests have allowed us to incorporate lots of travel and exploration into their learning. As a sidenote, I am happy to say, my sister's family recently decided to start home-schooling using Seton's materials, after observing how happy we were with the program. (My own girls recently asked me when summer would be over so that school could start again. Isn't that a nice testimony?)

Home-schooling is not easy, but it creates great minds. I am convinced of this.

Thanks for your time, and keep up the wonderful work.

Charity A. Vogel, Seton High School '93; English Ph.D 2004

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Elizabethtown, PA

Indiction of the Year of Faith

1. 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 a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. Rom 6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in him into his own glory (cf. Jn 17:22). To profess faith in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to believe in one God who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8): the Father, who in the fullness of time sent his Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of his death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord’s glorious return.

2. Ever since the start of my ministry as Successor of Peter, I have spoken of the need to rediscover the journey of faith so as to shed ever clearer light on the joy and renewed enthusiasm of the encounter with Christ. During the homily at the Mass marking the inauguration of my pontificate I said: “The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance.”[1] It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural and political consequences of their commitment, continuing

to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied. [2] Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, broadly accepted in its appeal to the content of the faith and the values inspired by it, today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.

3. We cannot accept that salt should become tasteless or the light be kept hidden (cf. Mt 5:13-16). The people of today can still experience the need to go to the well, like the Samaritan woman, in order to hear Jesus, who invites us to believe in him and to draw upon the source of living water welling up within him (cf. Jn 4:14). We must rediscover a taste for feeding ourselves on the word of God, faithfully handed down by the Church, and on the bread of life, offered as sustenance for his disciples (cf. Jn 6:51). Indeed, the teaching of Jesus still resounds in our day with the same power: “Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life” (Jn 6:27). The question posed by his listeners is the same that we ask today: “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” (Jn 6:28). We know Jesus’ reply: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent” (Jn 6:29). Belief in Jesus Christ, then, is the way to arrive definitively at salvation.

Pope Benedict XVI,
October 11, 2011