



THE MOST REVEREND PETER SMITH L.L.B., J.C.D.,
ARCHBISHOP OF SOUTHWARK,
ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE, 150 ST. GEORGE'S ROAD, SOUTHWARK, LONDON, SE1 6HX

Pastoral Letter
to be read on the Twenty Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time
Sunday, 7th October 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This coming year, beginning this week, we will be commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council in Rome in 1962, and the 20th Anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In the light of these very important anniversaries in the life of the Church, Pope Benedict XVI has asked the Church throughout the world to celebrate a "Year of Faith", beginning on the 11th October this year and ending on the Feast of Christ the King on the 24th November 2013. This "Year of Faith" will also be marked, this month, by a meeting of the Synod of Bishops in Rome, when bishops from round the world will be gathering with the Holy Father to discuss and reflect on new ways of bringing the Gospel to the people of our times.

The Holy Father wants us to "celebrate this Year in a worthy and fruitful manner" by reflecting on our God-given faith, which will help all of us "to acquire a more conscious and vigorous adherence to the Gospel, especially at a time of profound change such as humanity is currently experiencing." He goes on to say that we "will have the opportunity to profess our faith in the Risen Lord in our cathedrals and churches of the whole world; in our homes and among our families, so that everyone may feel a strong need to know better and to transmit to future generations, the faith of all times." "The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity the 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."

This coming year will also be a wonderful opportunity to build on the legacy of Pope Benedict's extremely successful visit to the United Kingdom in September 2010. We will have the opportunity to "rediscover the joy of believing" and to generate a greater enthusiasm for communicating with confidence the joy and hope of the Gospel to the communities in which we live, work and take our leisure. We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man; that he was sent by his Father to conquer sin and death, to redeem us and reconcile us to God our Father and open the way for all who believe in him to receive the gift of eternal life. Christ fulfilled the mission given to him by his Father through his life and ministry of preaching and teaching, through healing the sick and caring for the poor and needy. His life's work culminated in the Paschal Mystery of his passion, death and resurrection in which he freely gave up his life for our sake on the Cross.

After his ascension into heaven, on the feast of Pentecost, he sent down the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and disciples to establish his Church, the new people of God whose mission was, and still is, to proclaim the Gospel, the good news, to the whole world. St. Paul describes that mission well when he says in his Letter to the Romans: "*for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But they will not ask his help unless they believe in him, and they will not believe in him unless they have heard of him, and they will not hear of him unless they get a preacher, and they will never have a preacher unless one is sent. But as scripture says: The footsteps of those who bring good news is a welcome sound... So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the word of Christ.*" (Rom. 10: 13-17)

In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council devoted the entire second chapter of that document to the description of the Church as “the new people of God.” Consecrated by the gift of the Holy Spirit in baptism, we all share in different degrees in the one priesthood of Christ and we are all called to participate in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel to the people of our time through a life lived in accordance with the Gospel. As Pope Paul VI wrote, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* n.41)

And quite recently Pope Benedict drew on that image of the Church, speaking of that participation of all the baptised in terms of the “co-responsibility” of all the baptised in proclaiming the Gospel. This is what he said: “Co-responsibility requires a change of mentality, particularly with regard to the laity in the Church, who should be considered not as ‘collaborators’ with the clergy, but as persons truly ‘co-responsible’ for the being and activity of the Church. It is important, therefore, that a mature and committed laity be united, who are able to make their own specific contribution to the Church’s mission, in accordance with the ministries and tasks each one has in the life of the Church, and always in cordial communion with the bishops. Your particular vocation as lay faithful, who are called to be courageous witnesses in every sphere of society, is that the Gospel might be the light that brings hope in difficult situations, in troubles and in the darkness that we today so often find along the path.”

Today a booklet will be available after Mass for you to take home, together with a prayer card. The booklet will give information of the various events in the diocese marking the Year of Faith, and giving information on the resources available for all of us, parish communities, clergy and schools, to learn more about our faith and the Second Vatican Council, and references to a number of websites devoted to or relevant to faith and evangelisation. I encourage you to make sure you take a copy, and the prayer card.

I also want to encourage every parish, either through the parish council or a specially commissioned group within the parish, to get together and determine what you can do as a parish community in co-operation with your parish priest, to participate fully in the Year of Faith. I think that will be a good way to foster Pope Benedict’s understanding of the exercise of ‘co-responsibility’ and build up our parishes as communities of prayer, of vibrant and confident faith and good works, open to welcome those who come in search of Our Saviour, Jesus Christ. And to discover too what gifts the Holy Spirit has given each of us to be committed and steadfast ‘proclaimers of the Gospel’ in our neighbourhoods, at work and wherever we take our leisure. May God bless you all in your endeavours, and let’s pray for each other and support each other in this great opportunity the Holy Father has given us.

With an assurance of my prayers and good wishes,



Archbishop of Southwark

Given at Southwark,
1st October 2012,
the Feast of St Theresa of the Child Jesus