

DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE



✠ *Rt Rev Séamus Cunningham*
Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle



Pastoral Letter for the Year of Faith

To be read in all parishes on weekend of 29 / 30 September 2012

My Dear Brothers and Sisters

In anticipation of the *Year of Faith*, which the Holy Father has declared to start on 11 October, I would like to explore with you the faith that has been given to each of us through baptism. When I was growing up in Ireland priests and religious brothers and sisters would flock to many different parts of the world to share God's love. Their witness and the achievements of Catholic men and women throughout the centuries have revolutionised the world we live in. Our faith has brought to the world: the development of languages, the founding of hospitals, the creation of universities, many legal traditions and the advancement of many areas of science. Our Catholic faith can inspire progress in society while rooting us in the unshakable foundation of the Scriptures and Church Tradition.

The Catholic faith is not a set of abstract ideas that are subject to change depending on time or situation. Our faith is the encounter with Jesus Christ; an intimate relationship with the person who gives new meaning to our lives. It is because Christ is the same today, as he was yesterday and will be forever that we can be sure that our faith in him will never let us down and will lead us to eternal union with Him in Heaven.

As the body of Christ, present in the world, the Church teaches with the authority of Jesus Christ. This is good news because we can be sure that what the Church teaches leads us to salvation. Many Christians today believe that they can choose for themselves which Church teachings are true and which to follow. If we take upon ourselves the task of deciding what is true then we abandon God's will and make our will the centre of our world. Our Lord tells us with certainty the great dangers that result from abandoning God in today's Gospel reading (Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48).

As Christians we are called to abandon ourselves to God's will, which we find present in the faithful teaching of the Church. For us pilgrims journeying through the world the Church is always a sure compass for us to follow; a compass that will lead us to salvation.

In this coming *Year of Faith* the Lord is calling us to an "authentic and renewed conversion" (*Porta Fidei* §6). We are compelled to use the compass, which is the Church, to redirect our lives towards Christ. Authentic conversion always grounds us in Christ, through the Church, and then sends us out to meet Christ in the world. It is hoped that this coming *Year of Faith* will begin a kind of mission to those with whom we live, work and socialise.

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Your mission as the lay people of the Church is to sanctify the world in which you live, to make the world holy by being a witness to Jesus Christ. As your Pastor I implore you to take the faith you have received to the world so that they too can share in the salvation that Christ has won. The Church Father St. Augustine appeals to us, when he wrote:

"...you have received it and recited it [that is faith], but in your minds and hearts you must keep it ever present, you must repeat it in your beds, recall it in the public squares and not forget it during meals: even when your body is asleep, you must watch over it with your hearts."

It is my belief that this coming *Year of Faith* will be an opportunity for a personal rediscovery and growth in the faith. To help us the Holy Father has asked us specifically to read the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the Catechism of the Catholic Church so that our faith may be informed and strengthened.

The Catechism explains that 'Faith is already the beginning of eternal life' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* §163). Let the joy that comes from this knowledge motivate us to embrace the *Year of Faith* so that we may refocus our gaze on the Lord and be renewed in our minds and hearts.

I invite you all on 11 October to St Benet's Church in Sunderland, where I will celebrate a diocesan Mass at 7.00 pm to inaugurate the *Year of Faith*.

During this coming *Year*, which will conclude on the Solemnity of Christ the King on 24 November 2013, there will be many diocesan and deanery events, including pilgrimages, talks and times of prayer. Information about these events will be sent to your parishes and will be available on our diocesan website.

"Glory to Him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine."
(Ephesians 3:20)

My prayers will be with you during this grace filled year ahead.

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