

(headline) Year of Faith ‘Unity in Diversity’ Opening Mass homily

Editor’s Note: With his Apostolic Letter of Oct. 11, 2011, *Porta Fidei*, Pope Benedict XVI declared that a "Year of Faith" would begin on Oct. 11, 2012 and conclude on November 24, 2013. During the Year of Faith, Catholics are asked to study and reflect on the documents of Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church so that they might deepen their knowledge of the faith.

The following is a transcript of Bishop Charles C. Thompson’s homily from the Oct. 11 “Unity in Diversity Mass” at St. Benedict Cathedral in Evansville, which signified the beginning of the Year of Faith in our diocese.

St. Benedict Cathedral, Evansville

Oct. 11, 2012

Readings: Galatians 3:1-5; Ps (Luke 1:69-75); Luke 11:5-13

At first sound, the opening words of the first reading sound rather harsh. That’s because they are; “O Stupid Galatians.” We are taught very early in life that it is not polite to call someone “stupid.” Evidently, St. Paul’s mother did not do a good job with her son’s vocabulary. Then again, it is St. Paul. Somehow, I suspect that he would be as much of a handful as a child as an adult. His point about the value of the Spirit in the life of believers, however, is an essential aspect of faith. It is the Spirit which speaks to us through the written and proclaimed Word of God. It is the Spirit that prompts and permeates our good works. We do well to entrust this *Year of Faith* to the guidance, prompting and working of the Spirit. May we do so with minds and hearts open to the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that binds our unity in diversity.

Catholics in dioceses throughout the world have entered into the special “year of grace,” marking the 50th Anniversary of Second Vatican Council’s opening session. Of course, this year also marks the 20th Anniversary for the publishing of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, exhorts each and every baptized Catholic, young and old, clergy and laity, to commit ourselves to an ever-deepening embrace of study, reflection and prayer. He specifically encourages us to look to the documents of Vatican II and the *Catechism* to discover anew the content of faith that is necessarily reflected in the action of authentic discipleship in witness to Jesus Christ.

Our Gospel passage from St. Luke, the actual gospel reading of the day, emphasizes that long-standing axiom of St. Anselm; namely, the awesome power of “faith seeking understanding.” Here, Jesus exhorts his disciples to ask, seek and knock. In other words, in light of the exhortation from our Holy Father, those who seek to follow Him must persevere in study, reflection and prayer. Such perseverance, Jesus assures us, pays off.

“Faith seeking understanding” denotes a sense of movement. This movement, in the language of the Church, is known as life-long formation and education; ongoing conversion. This is what it means to be missionary. The Church exists for the mission of evangelization. All the baptized are called to share in this mission. Full participation in such a mission requires that we are not only willing to be instruments of evangelization but that we are humble and courageous enough to be open to be evangelized. Celebrating the diversity within the unity of what is means to be Church, to be People of God, we are called to draw from the rich heritage of language, culture, wisdom and experience among the various peoples that make up the face of the Church. This notion of unity within diversity, underlying what it means to be Catholic, directs us to seek ongoing dialogue with other Christians and beyond, including believers and non-believers (e.g. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc.).

We have been given a tremendous task, to carry on the mission of Jesus Christ; namely, to proclaim the good news as we seek to embrace the Will of God in all things so as to realize the fullness of the Kingdom of God. This is no easy task, to say the least. It is beyond the scope of mere human merit. We must rely upon the Holy Spirit to make any progress or success. In doing so, we will be transforming the world. Anything less will only result in our being transformed by the world. The focus of such transformation, however, must begin within us. To be authentic in our witness of the faith, we must adhere to the Church's teaching about formation, education and conversion as a lifelong, ongoing process. We must truly know our faith, if we are to provide credible representation of Catholic belief and teaching. We must not lose sight that any authentic cooperation with the Holy Spirit necessarily means that we point to Jesus Christ rather than bringing attention to ourselves. He, in turn, demands that all attention be given to the good news of the kingdom of God at hand.

We have become too polarized in practically all spheres of relating—not only politically and economically, but even in religious belief and practice. In polarization, each extreme is convinced of having cornered the truth. Thus, there is no need for dialogue, mutual respect or willingness to listen. An either/or existence is not true to Catholic identity. Catholic orthodoxy, authentic truth, is to be found in the center rather than at the extreme poles. In this *Year of Faith*, as we celebrate “unity in our diversity”, I propose that our credibility lies within our ability to be consistent with a both/and approach to the values, principles and truth of faith; Unity & Diversity; Being & Doing; Formation & Education (in lifelong process of conversion); Peace & Justice; Ministry & Service; Word & Sacrament; Scripture & Tradition (Deposit of Faith); Liturgy & Social Teaching (Fidelity to both sets of principles); God & Neighbor (the two great commandments of love); Courage & Compassion (Teaching & Living Convictions); Cross & Resurrection (path of discipleship); Life & Death; Unborn and Born (Respect Life); Law & Spirit; Religion & Spirituality; Clergy & Laity; Faith & Reason; Antiquity & Mission; Mind & Heart; Body & Blood. The both/and embrace of our faith leads us to the center of unity in Jesus Christ rather than pulled apart by the either/or extremes of polarization. Pulled toward the outer extremes, we suffer division. Drawn toward the center, we enjoy unity of the spirit. To be a truly Eucharistic community, we must remain Christ-centered.

If we ask, we will receive. If we seek, we will find. If we knock, the door may be open. We may not necessarily receive, find or enter the door of personal wants and desire. If we are faithful to embracing the Will of God and seeking first the Kingdom of God, we will receive, find and enter the door of what we need for our mission and our salvation. We need only have faith and remain open in mind and heart to the transforming grace of the Holy Trinity—Father, Son & Spirit—that unites us as “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.” There's no better way to begin than “faith seeking to understand.”