

JMJ - Talk 2

August 13th, 2011 - Firm in the faith - Malaga

Faith is a precious gift that needs to be carefully cultivated. Just as a seed needs the right amount of sunlight, water and nutrients to grow healthy and strong, so the wonderful gift of faith needs to be nourished and cared for in special way. Faith can die or it can be lost. We can exchange it for something artificial or even false. We are here in Málaga preparing for World Youth Day. The theme invites us to be rooted deeply in faith, to have strong foundations, to be firm in our faith. How can a young person build a strong life of faith on Christ in these times?

Just as a bicycle has two wheels to move, I would say that faith needs **two wheels** to grow, to develop so that it becomes strong faith, deeply rooted and firmly built. The two wheels are: **personal encounter with Jesus Christ** and **living the faith within the community of the Church**. With these two wheels, the bicycle of faith will develop and grow strong. I will speak first about the wheel of personal encounter with Jesus and then about the wheel of learning the faith within the community.

Faith is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ in which I come to know, love and believe in him. If I open my heart to him, Jesus will come to me. Each of us discovers Jesus in different ways at different times in our lives. In the Gospel of Mark, we see a young man who came running to Jesus to ask him what must be done to share in everlasting life (Mk 10:21). The passage tells us that Jesus looked at him and loved him. All of you, young women and men, who have come to World Youth Day, are like that young man in St. Mark's Gospel, coming to ask Jesus, how can your faith be strong and firm, how can you receive the gift of eternal life? I assure you that Jesus is looking right into your eyes and hearts with much love to deepen your faith, your friendship with him. I ask Jesus that your experience of World Youth Day together with Pope Benedict and with each other may help you to see Jesus looking into your eyes, smiling at you and loving you, deepening your faith in him.

This personal encounter with Jesus Christ is a gift and treasure from God. What can I do to make room for this gift in my life and in my heart so that it deepens and becomes stronger?

Pope Benedict explained some ways when he wrote a beautiful message for World Youth Day a year ago: "Try each day to follow Christ's word. Listen to him as a true friend with whom you can share your path in life. With him at your side, you will find courage and hope to face difficulties and problems, and even to overcome disappointments and set-backs." Again our Holy Father suggested, "Enter into a personal dialogue with Jesus Christ and cultivate your faith. Get to know him better by reading the Gospels and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Converse with him in prayer, and place your trust in him. He will never betray that trust!"

Personal relationship with Jesus Christ is one of the wheels on the bicycle of faith. There is another wheel that must turn in sync with the personal relationship with Jesus. **This is the wheel of faith lived in the community of the Church**. I think that all of you live and participate in community, a parish and a diocese. This community of faith is the Body of Christ in time and in space and it is there that our faith in Jesus is lived, celebrated, nourished and deepened.

Pope Benedict reminded us that our faith in Jesus is bound to the faith of the Church. "We do not believe as isolated individuals, but rather through Baptism, we are members of this great family; it is the faith professed by the Church which reinforces our personal faith... The *Creed* that we proclaim at Sunday Mass protects us from the danger of believing in a God other than the one revealed by Christ: 'Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by my faith I help support others in the faith' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 166)." The experience of World Youth Day is a beautiful expression of being supported by a great chain of believers.

Today we emphasize the individual, his/her rights and freedom. Society is dominated by an individualist way of thinking and when it comes to faith we often forget the role of the Church community. We think we can believe whatever we want and the way we want. Because faith in Jesus

comes to us from the Church and is expressed in the Creed, we must be committed to that Creed and Church which reveals God's truth to us. We can't just listen and follow whatever comes to our own heads, but we must listen to the Holy Spirit speaking in the wisdom of the Church. This is the call to be faithful, to be true and to have integrity of faith.

My young sisters and brothers, be committed to know Jesus in and through your parish or local church community. As you develop a personal relationship with Jesus, study the faith of the Church so that you grow in understanding it and adhering to it with greater conviction, making it more and more your own. You will then be strong witnesses of the faith and not blown around like a leaf in the wind. In the community of the Church the faith is handed on, nourished, deepened and celebrated. In this way we walk in faithfulness, truth and integrity.

I would like to remind everyone that in the Catholic Church the seven sacraments are fundamental to deepening and strengthening our faith because in they are both personal encounters with Jesus Christ and community celebrations. Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Penance, Marriage, Orders and Anointing of the Sick... each is the celebration of the community of the Church bringing us life, healing, strength, unity, forgiveness in a very personal and community experience of Jesus. Let the sacraments be central to your lives!

Our bicycle of faith has **two wheels**: the wheel of **personal friendship with Jesus** and the wheel of **faith lived in the community of the Church**. Where will we go on our bicycle of faith? **Our faith sends us to mission, to service**. That young man who asked Jesus about having the fullness of life told Jesus he followed all the commandments and asked what else he must do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all that he had, give it to the poor and then to come follow him. Faith in Jesus must produce good fruits; it leads to mission, to serve others generously. As we reach out to help others, especially the poor, we meet Jesus and our faith grows and deepens.

You who are young have compassionate hearts, boundless ideals and tons of energy. You are concerned with those who are hungry, who suffer war and violence, who are made to suffer. You worry about our environment and seek to protect it. You imagine a world of peace and harmony. Allow the goodness in your hearts, your high ideals and youthful vigor help you to reach out to the needy and abandoned as brothers and sisters. May your faith in Jesus and your commitment to the Church be a light in our world and bring about "the civilization of love." Rooted firmly in Jesus and built on him, you will stand firm to being the light and freshness of the Gospel to our world.

I ask the Mother of Jesus, who is the Mother of all Christians, to help us grow strong in our faith.

Quotations are from "MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI FOR THE TWENTY-SIXTH WORLD YOUTH DAY (2011)" *Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2010*