

# Catholic

**UPDATE**

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## ‘LIGHT OF FAITH’: KEY THEMES FROM POPE FRANCIS’ FIRST ENCYCLICAL



He calls our Catholic faith a light “capable of illuminating *every aspect* of human existence.” Faith serves as a light for our journey and gives us a firm foundation for our lives. It transforms and unites us.



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This Update contains excerpts from *Lumen Fidei* ("Light of Faith"), issued on June 29, 2013. Completing the "fine work" begun by Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis added "a few contributions" of his own and concludes a series of encyclicals on the virtues of faith, hope, and charity (love).



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**F**aith is born of an encounter with the living God who calls us and reveals his love, a love upon which we can lean for security and for building our lives. The word which God speaks to us in Jesus is not simply one word among many, but his eternal Word. Christian faith is thus faith in a perfect love, in its decisive power, in its ability to transform the world.

Our culture has lost its sense of God's tangible presence and activity in our world. Christians profess faith in God's powerful love which really does act in history: a love that can be encountered, a love fully revealed in Christ's passion, death and resurrection.

The clearest proof of the reliability of Christ's love is to be found in his dying for our sake. Had the Father's love not caused Jesus to rise from the dead, had it not been able to restore his body to life, then it would not be a completely reliable love, capable of illuminating also the gloom of death.

## SEEING WITH EYES OF FAITH

Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus sees them. Christ's life, his way of knowing the Father and living in complete relationship with him, opens up new vistas for human experience.

Christian faith is faith in a God who is so close to us that he entered our human history. Our faith enables us to see how

much God loves this world and is constantly guiding it towards himself. This leads us to live our lives with greater commitment and intensity.

Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The life of the believer becomes a life lived in the Church. Just as Christ gathers to himself all who believe and makes them his body, so the Christian comes to see himself as a member of this body, in an essential relationship with all other believers.

Faith transforms the whole person to the extent that he or she becomes open to love. Once we discover the full light of Christ's love, we realize that each of the loves in our own lives had always contained a ray of that light. That fact helps us to see how all love is meant to share in the complete self-gift of the Son of God for our sake.

## A LIGHT FOR SCIENCE AND SEEKERS

[Faith] also illumines the material world. Faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness. By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on the world.

Faith also has to do with the lives of those men and women who, though not believers, desire to believe and continue to seek. To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they can find, they are already on the path leading to faith. Anyone who sets off on the path of doing good to others is already drawing near to God.

## REFLECTING THE LIGHT TO OTHERS

The light of Christ shines, as in a mirror, upon the face of Christians so that we too can share in that vision and reflect that light to others.

Because faith is born of an encounter which takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. It is through an unbroken chain of witnesses that we come to see the face of Jesus.

Persons live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. Faith is not simply an individual decision which takes place in the depths of the



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## LIGHT FOR THE JOURNEY

Christ says: “I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness” (Jn 12:46). Those who believe see with a light that illumines their entire journey. In the absence of light it is impossible to tell good from evil, or the road to our destination from other roads.

believer’s heart. By its very nature, faith is open to the “We” of the Church. We can respond in the singular—“I believe”—only because we also say “We believe.”

This reflects the openness of God’s own love, which is not only a relationship between the Father and the Son, but is also, in the Spirit, a “We,” a communion of persons. Here we see why those who believe are never alone, and why faith tends to spread, as it invites others to share in its joy.

Faith is one because it is shared by the whole Church, which is one body and one Spirit. By professing the same faith, we stand firm on the same rock, we are transformed by the same Spirit of love, we radiate one light.

Because it is linked to love, the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law and peace. [It] is capable of enhancing the richness of human relations, their ability to endure, to be trustworthy, to enrich our life together. Faith does not draw us away from the world or prove irrelevant to the concrete concerns of our time.

Faith is truly a good for everyone. Its light does not simply brighten the interior of the Church, nor does it serve solely to build an eternal city in the hereafter; it helps us build our societies in such a way that they can journey towards a future of hope. The hands of faith are raised up to heaven, even as they go about building in charity a city based on relationships in which the love of God is laid as a foundation.

### FAMILIES OF FAITH

The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. The stable union of man and woman in marriage is born of their love, as a sign and presence of God’s own love, and of the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual

## FAITHFUL SUFFERING

The psalmist exclaims: “I kept my faith, even when I said, ‘I am greatly afflicted’” (Ps 116:10). To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing, yet it is in weakness and suffering that we discover God’s power which triumphs over our weakness and suffering.

Christians know that suffering cannot be eliminated, yet it can have meaning and become an act of love and entrustment into the hands of God who does not abandon us; in this way it can serve as a moment of growth in faith and love. By contemplating Christ’s union with the Father even at the height of his sufferings on the cross, Christians learn to share in the same gaze of Jesus. Even death is illumined and can be experienced as the ultimate call to faith, the ultimate “Go forth from your land” (Gen 12:1), the ultimate “Come!” spoken by the Father, to whom we abandon ourselves in the confidence that he will keep us steadfast even in our final passage.

Faith is not a light which scatters all our darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey. To those who suffer, God does not provide arguments which explain everything; rather, his response is that of an accompanying presence, a history of goodness which touches every story of suffering and opens up a ray of light. In Christ, God himself wishes to share this path with us and to offer us his gaze so that we might see the light within it. Christ is the one who, having endured suffering, is “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2).

## DIG DEEPER

How would your life be different if you hadn’t accepted the gift of faith?

How comfortable are you with making your faith known outside your family or parish?

How will you share the “light of faith” with another this week?

differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh and are enabled to give birth to a new life. Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan which sustains us and enables us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love. Faith also helps us to grasp in all its depth and richness the begetting of children.

Children learn to trust in the love of their parents. It is so important that parents encourage shared expressions of faith which can help children gradually to mature in their own faith. Young people, who are going through a period in their lives which is so complex, rich and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant closeness and support of their families and the Church in their journey of faith.

Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted, but something which enhances our lives. It makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy and worth embracing, for it is based on God's faithfulness.



## A LIGHT FOR LIFE IN SOCIETY

Thanks to faith we have come to understand the unique dignity of each person, God's love, his concrete concern for every person, and his plan of salvation which embraces all of humanity and all creation. Faith, by revealing the love of God the Creator, enables us to respect nature and to discern in it a dwelling place entrusted to our protection and care.

Faith also helps us to devise models of development based not simply on utility and profit, but consider creation as a gift; it teaches us to create just forms of government. Faith likewise offers the possibility of forgiveness. Rather than avoiding conflict, we need to confront it in an effort to resolve and move beyond it, to make it a link in a chain, as part of a progress towards unity.

God, by his concrete actions, makes a public avowal that he is present in our midst and that he desires to solidify every human relationship. Faith illumines life and society. It

possesses a creative light for each new moment of history. It sets every event in relationship to the origin and destiny of all things in the Father.

The Mother of the Lord is the perfect icon of faith. Let us turn in prayer to Mary:

*Mother Mary, help our faith!  
Open our ears to hear God's word  
and to recognize his voice and call.  
Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus,  
that he may be light for our path.  
And may this light of faith always increase in us.  
We make this prayer in the name of Christ, your Son, our Lord!  
Amen.*

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*These excerpts were selected from the official English translation of Lumen Fidei ("Light of Faith") found at [vatican.va](http://vatican.va). You may purchase the complete text in booklet or e-book format (English and Spanish versions) from [usccepublishing.org](http://usccepublishing.org).*



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