

January 13, 2012

My dear Lay Missionaries of Charity,

Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. (1Peter 3:15-16)

Saint Peter wrote this to Christian believers in the first century. Presuming we have a strong Christian hope, we must be ready to give a reason (*apologia* in Greek) for that hope. As we begin a new year, it is good for us to reflect, "Do I have hope?" "Why do I have hope?" "Why do I believe?"

In our day, the Successor of St. Peter writes this to us again. Pope Benedict XVI preached on this during his New Year's Eve homily at the end of 2011, saying it is the most urgent pastoral challenge facing us today. Let us open our hearts to receive his powerful pastoral leadership for us:

"In the Diocese of Rome, as elsewhere, the most urgent pastoral challenge facing us is the *quaestio fidei*. Christ's disciples are called to reawaken in themselves and in others the longing for God and the joy of living him and bearing witness to him, on the basis of what is always a deeply personal question: why do I believe? We must give primacy to truth, seeing the combination of faith and reason as two wings with which the human spirit can rise to the contemplation of the Truth (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, Prologue); we must ensure that the dialogue between Christianity and modern culture bears fruit; we must see to it that the beauty and contemporary relevance of the faith is rediscovered, not as an isolated event, affecting some particular moment in our lives, but as a constant orientation, affecting even the simplest choices, establishing a profound unity within the person, so that he becomes just, hard-working, generous and good. What is needed is to give new life to a faith that can serve as a basis for a new humanism, one that is able to generate culture and social commitment." (*Homily of Pope Benedict XVI for Te Deum and First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, December 31, 2011*)

Pope Benedict asks us to reflect on the question of faith (*quaestio fidei*) which he furthers translates for us into the question, "Why do I believe?" He notes that this is a deeply personal question. That is because it gives the outlines of our faith journey. We believe, because we have met a Person, Jesus Christ, whom we believe is the answer to our cry for help. Each of us has cried for help in different ways. Jesus is the universal Answer to every individual cry. He is God's Loving Response to each one of us. It would be good for us to reflect on this question, "Why do I believe?" It would be a beautiful thing also to share our deeply personal answer to that question, perhaps at a monthly meeting or with the poor or with our families.

One way to read Pope Benedict's question to us is by recounting the story of our coming to faith. In other words, we reflect, "What has happened that has caused me to believe in Jesus Christ?" Another way to look at that question is to ask, "Why do I continue to believe? What difference does it make to be Christian?"

In this regard, as LMCs, I think we have a kind of "communal" answer to that question. One thing that unites us in the LMC Movement is our faith that it does something for us when we believe in Jesus Christ. It lights a particular fire in our hearts. I find that so beautifully expressed in the words of Jesus to Bl. Mother Teresa, "In your immolation, in your love for Me, they will see Me, know Me, want Me. Offer more sacrifices, smile more tenderly and pray more fervently..."

Simply said, by believing in Jesus and loving Jesus, we are changed. We are able to offer more sacrifices. We are able to smile more tenderly. We are able to pray more fervently. It is a change that happens deep within us. Smiles only rise up from deep within us. Prayer only rises up from deep within us. Sacrifice happens only if it begins deep within us. Believing in Jesus changes us into people who are more loving, more tender, more smiling, more fervent. That is already extremely exciting. Isn't that what we were looking for? Isn't that what we thirsted for?

Furthermore, that excitement is evangelical. We want it to be contagious. We want others to have it. It is so good to be happy, loving, tender, fervent. We want others to have it too. How can we share it with others? How can we help them catch it? Jesus told Mother, "In your immolation, in your love for Me, they will see Me, know Me, want Me." We can share the gift by living it, by offering more sacrifices, smiling more tenderly, praying more fervently. We must eventually make it the only theme of our life. As Little Flower said, "The world is on fire. There is no time to talk about things of lesser importance." Pope Paul VI said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." As Jesus said to Mother Teresa, "In your immolation..."

Jesus is calling us to give ourselves totally, not in half measures. Pope Benedict is calling us to know what we believe and to know *why* we believe. St. Peter is telling us that we need to know how to tell others about why we believe. Little Flower is telling us we do not have time for anything else. As we begin this New Year, let us take the time to reflect on our faith journey, to ponder what difference it makes in our lives that we believe in Jesus; let us be open to sharing that with others and to make the sacrifices Jesus is asking for, "Offer more sacrifices, smile more tenderly and pray more fervently..."

I remain united with you in prayer in the *Pax Benedicti* and in the love of Christ.

Sincerely,
Father Boniface, OSB
LMC USA National Spiritual Director