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THE LIGHT OF FAITH 3

Faith and the common good

The third priority of the laity, according to Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and in his OFS Rule of 1978, art.14-15, is to build up the civil community. Popes Benedict XVI and Francis treat of the role of Faith in contributing to the common good.

50. In presenting the story of the patriarchs and the righteous men and women of the Old Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews highlights an essential aspect of their faith. That faith is not only presented as a journey, but also as a process of building, the preparing of a place in which human beings can dwell together with one another. The first builder was Noah who saved his family in the ark (*Heb 11:7*). Then comes Abraham, of whom it is said that by faith he dwelt in tents, as he looked forward to the city with firm foundations (cf. *Heb 11:9-10*). With faith comes a new reliability, a new firmness, which God alone can give. If the man of faith finds support in the God of fidelity, the God who is Amen (cf. *Is 65:16*), and thus becomes firm himself, we can now also say that firmness of faith marks the city which God is preparing for mankind. Faith reveals just how firm the bonds between people can be when God is present in their midst. Faith does not merely grant interior firmness, a steadfast conviction on the part of the believer; it also sheds light on every human relationship because it is born of love and reflects God's own love. The God who is himself reliable gives us a city which is reliable.

51. Precisely because it is linked to love (cf. *Gal 5:6*), the light of faith is concretely placed at the service of justice, law and peace. Faith is born of an encounter with God's primordial love, wherein the meaning and goodness of our life become evident; our life is illumined to the extent that it enters into the space opened by that love, to the extent that it becomes, in other words, a path and praxis leading to the fullness of love. The light of faith 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 the men and women of our time. Without a love which is trustworthy, nothing could truly keep men and women united. Human unity would be conceivable only on the basis of utility, on a calculus of conflicting interests or on fear, but not on the goodness of living together, not on the joy which the mere presence of others can give. Faith makes us appreciate the architecture of human relationships because it grasps their ultimate foundation and definitive destiny in God, in his love, and thus sheds light on the art of building; as such it becomes a service to the common good. Faith is truly a good for everyone; it is a common good. 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....

[Note: Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.70, listed suffering among the evangelizing activities of the laity. Popes Benedict XVI and Francis have a special word about Faith as consoling and strengthening us when we are suffering.]

Consolation and strength amid suffering

56. Writing to the Christians of Corinth about his sufferings and tribulations, Saint Paul links his faith to his preaching of the Gospel... To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing, yet it is precisely in such testing that Paul sees the most convincing proclamation of the Gospel, for it is in weakness and suffering that we discover God's power which triumphs over our weakness and suffering. The apostle himself experienced a dying which would become life for Christians (cf. *2 Cor* 4:7-12). In the hour of trial faith brings light, while suffering and weakness make it evident that "we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord" (*2 Cor* 4:5)... 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 (cf. *Mk* 15:34), 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.

57. Nor does the light of faith make us forget the sufferings of this world. How many men and women of faith have found mediators of light in those who suffer! So it was with Saint Francis of Assisi and the leper, or with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her poor. They understood the mystery at work in them. In drawing near to the suffering, they were certainly not able to eliminate all their pain or to explain every evil. 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).

Suffering reminds us that faith's service to the common good is always one of hope — a hope which looks ever ahead in the knowledge that only from God, from the future which comes from the risen Jesus, can our society find solid and lasting foundations. In this sense faith is linked to hope, for even if our dwelling place here below is wasting away, we have an eternal dwelling place which God has already prepared in Christ, in his body (cf. *2 Cor* 4:16-5:5). The dynamic of faith, hope and charity thus leads us to embrace the concerns of all men and women on our journey towards that city "whose architect and builder is God" (*Heb* 11:10), for "hope does not disappoint" (*Rom* 5:5).

For the full text of *Lumen Fidei*, go to:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei_en.html

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