**In The School of Mary**  
(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)  
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**Pope Francis**  

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**INTRODUCTION**

1. In the Light of Faith the Church's tradition speaks of the great gift brought by Jesus who said, "I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." (Jn 12:46) Pagans hungering for light had seen the growth of the cult of the sun god, Sol Invictus. This sun does not illumine all reality; its rays cannot penetrate the shadows of death where our eyes are closed to its light. Christians invoked Jesus as the true sun "whose rays bestow life". To Martha, at the death of her brother, Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" (Jn 11:40) Those who believe, see with a light illuminating their entire journey; ...from the risen Christ, the morning star that never sets.

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**An Illusory Light?**

2. We can almost hear the objections of many contemporaries. In modern times, that light, sufficient for societies of old, is of no use for new times, for a humanity come of age, proud of its rationality. Faith thus appears to some as an illusory light. Nietzsche encouraged his sister, Elizabeth, to take risks, to read "new paths …as one who must find his own way. This is where humanity’s paths part: if you want peace of soul and happiness, then believe, but if you want to be a follower of truth, then seek". Belief would be incompatible with seeking. From this starting point, Nietzsche criticized Christianity for diminishing the full meaning of human existence. Faith would thus be the illusion of light, an illusion that blocks the path of a liberated humanity to its future.

3. Thus, faith comes to be associated with darkness. Some tried to save faith by making room for it alongside the light of reason wherever certainty was no longer possible. In the absence of light, faith became a leap in the dark, a subjective light, but not something that could be proposed to others as an objective light that points the way. Eventually, it would become evident that the light of autonomous reason was not enough to illumine the future. The future remained fraught with fear of the unknown. As a result, humanity renounced the search for a great light, Truth itself, contenting itself with smaller lights illuminating fleeting moments. In the absence of light everything becomes confused, impossible to tell good from evil, paths of endless circles going nowhere.
A Light to Be Recovered

4. There is an urgent need to see once again that faith is a light. The light of faith is unique, capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence. However, light this powerful cannot come from ourselves. It must come from God. Faith is born of an encounter with the living God who reveals his love and upon which we can lean for security in our lives. Transformed by this love we gain a fresh vision of a great promise of fulfillment. Faith, received as a supernatural gift, becomes a light for our way. It is a light coming from the past, a foundational memory of Jesus revealing his trustworthy love, a love capable of triumphing over death. Since Christ has risen and draws us beyond death, faith is also a light coming from the future guiding us beyond our isolated selves towards the breadth of communion. We see that faith does not dwell in shadow and gloom. It is a light for our darkness. It is this light of faith that I now wish to consider, at a time when mankind is in need of light.

5. Christ assured Peter: “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” He then told him to strengthen his brothers and sisters in that same faith. Conscious of the duty entrusted to the Successor of Peter, Benedict XVI proclaimed the present Year of Faith as a time of grace that is helping us to sense the great joy of believing and professing that faith in it unity and integrity. This conviction, born of a faith centered on Christ and on the power of his grace, inspired the mission of the first Christians. For those early Christians, faith, as an encounter with the living God revealed in Christ, as a “mother” that brought them to the light and gave birth to divine life in them. It was a luminous vision of existence preparing them to bear public witness to the end.

6. The Year of Faith was inaugurated on the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, a clear indication that Vatican II was a Council on faith. It asked us to restore God in Christ to the center of our lives. The Church never takes faith for granted. She knows that this gift of God needs to be nurtured. The Second Vatican Council enabled the light of faith to illumine our human experience. It clearly showed how faith enriches life in all its dimensions.

7. These considerations on faith supplement what Benedict XVI had written in his encyclicals on charity and hope. He had almost completed a first draft of an encyclical on faith as well. As his brother in Christ I now add a few contributions of my own. The Successor of Peter, yesterday, today and tomorrow, is always called to strengthen his brothers and sisters in the priceless treasure of faith, given as a light for humanity’s path. In God’s gift of faith a great love has been offered us, a good word has been spoken to us. When we welcome that word, Jesus Christ the Word made flesh, the Holy Spirit transforms us and lights our way. Thus wonderfully interwoven, faith, hope and charity are the driving force of the Christian life as it advances toward full communion with God. But what is it like this road opened before us by faith? What is the origin of this powerful light that brightens the journey of life?
CHAPTER ONE: WE HAVE BELIEVED IN LOVE (cf. 1 Jn 4:16)

Abraham, Our Father in Faith

8. Faith opens the way accompanying us through time. If we want to understand what faith is, we need to follow the route it has taken. A unique place belongs to Abraham, our father in faith. Faith is linked to hearing. Abraham does not see God, but hears his voice. God is not the god of a place but the God of a person, the God of Abraham, capable of establishing a covenant with him. Faith is our response to a personal encounter, to a “Thou” who calls us by name.

9. The word spoken to Abraham contained a call and a promise. First, a summons to a new life that pointed him towards an unforeseen future. The sight that faith gave to Abraham would be linked to the need to take a step forward. This word also contained a promise: “You will be the father of a great nation.” As a response to a word, Abraham’s faith would be an act of remembrance, the memory of a promise opening up the future, shedding light on the path to be taken. Faith is thus closely bound up with hope.

10. Abraham is asked to entrust himself to this word. Faith understands that when spoken by the God who is fidelity that word becomes absolutely unshakable. Faith accepts this word as a rock upon which we can build. In the Bible, faith is expressed by the Hebrew word ‘emunah, derived from ‘aman whose root means “to uphold”. ‘emunah can signify God’s fidelity and man’s faith. The man’s faith gains strength by putting himself in the hands of the God who is faithful. Playing on this double meaning of the word, Church Fathers such as Saint Augustine explain: “Man is faithful when he believes in God; God is faithful when he grants what he has promised.”

11. God’s word was not alien to Abraham’s experience. In his voice the patriarch recognized a profound call that was always present at the core of his being. God tied his promise to that aspect of human life that appeared most “full of promise”, namely, the begetting of new life: “Sarah your wife shall bear you a son. The God who asks Abraham for complete trust reveals himself to be the source of all life. Faith is thus linked to God’s fatherhood. The God who calls Abraham is the Creator, the one who “calls into existence” (Rom 4:17), the one who “chose us before the foundation of the world… and destined us for adoption as his children”. (Eph 1:4-5) For Abraham, faith in God sheds light on the depths of his being, the wellspring of all things and the realization that his life is not the product of non-being or chance, but the fruit of a personal call and a personal love. The mysterious God who called him is no alien deity, but the God who is the origin and mainstay of all that is.

The great test of Abraham’s faith, the sacrifice of his son Isaac, showed that love is capable of ensuring life even beyond death. The word that could raise up a son to one who was “as good as dead”, in “the barrenness” of Sarah’s womb, could also stand by his promise of a future beyond all threat of danger.
The Faith of Israel

12. The history of the people of Israel in the Book of Exodus followed in the wake of Abraham’s faith. Israel trusted in God, who promised to set his people free from their misery. Faith becomes a summons to a lengthy journey. God’s love is seen to be like that of a father. Israel’s confession of faith took shape as an account of God’s deeds in setting his people free and acting as their guide. God’s light shone for Israel through the Lord’s mighty deeds, recalled and celebrated in worship, and passed down from parents to children. The light of faith is linked to concrete life-stories, to the grateful remembrance of God’s mighty deeds and the fulfillment of his promises. God’s light comes to us through the account of his self-revelation, illuminating our passage through time by recalling his gifts and the fulfillment of his promises.

13. The history of Israel also showed us the temptation of unbelief. This opposite of faith is shown to be idolatry. While Moses is speaking to God on Sinai, the people cannot endure the time of waiting to see his face. Faith is an invitation to turn to the source of the light, while respecting the mystery of a countenance to unveil itself personally in its own good time. In place of faith in God, it seemed better to worship an idol. Before an idol, there is no risk that we will be called to abandon our security, for idols “have mouths, but they cannot speak.” Idols exist as a pretext for setting ourselves at the center of reality and worshipping the work of our own hands. In refusing to await the time of promise, our life-story disintegrates into a myriad of unconnected instants. Idolatry is always polytheism, an aimless passing from one lord to another. It does not offer a journey but rather a plethora of paths leading to forming a vast labyrinth. Faith, tied to conversion, is the opposite of idolatry. It turns to the living God in a personal encounter. Believing means entrusting oneself to a merciful love that accepts and pardons, sustains and directs our lives. Faith consists in the willingness to let ourselves be constantly transformed and renewed by God’s call. Turning towards the Lord is a sure path that liberates us from the dissolution imposed upon us by idols.

14. In the faith of Israel we also encounter the figure of Moses, the mediator. It is Moses who speaks to YHWH on the mountain and then tells the others of the Lord’s will. Israel learns to journey together in unity. The individual’s act of faith finds its place within a community, who, in faith, is like a single person—“my first-born son” as God would describe all of Israel. Here mediation is not an obstacle, but an opening: our gaze rises to a truth greater than ourselves. On the basis of an individualistic conception of knowledge one cannot appreciate the significance of mediation, this capacity to participate in the vision of another, shared knowledge that is the knowledge proper to love. God’s free gift of Faith requires humility and the courage to trust and entrust. It lets us see the luminous path to the encounter of God and humanity; the history of salvation.

The Fullness of Christian Faith

15. “Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad.” (Jn 8:56) Abraham’s faith pointed to Jesus himself. St. Augustine understood it so when he stated that the patriarchs were
saved by faith, a faith pressing towards a future in Jesus. Christian faith is centered on Christ. All the threads of the Old Testament converge on Christ. He is the definitive “Yes” to all the promises. The history of Jesus is the complete manifestation of God’s reliability. The life of Jesus now appears as the locus of God’s definitive intervention, the supreme manifestation of his love for us. The word that God speaks to us in Jesus is his eternal Word. Christian faith is thus faith in a perfect love, capable of transforming the world and unfolding its history. In the love of God revealed in Jesus, faith perceives the foundation on which all reality and its final destiny rest.

16. The clearest proof of the reliability of Christ’s love is to be found in his dying for our sake, even for his enemies, to transform their hearts. The evangelists could see the hour of Christ’s crucifixion as the culmination of the gaze of faith. John, together with the Mother of Jesus, gazed upon the pierced one. “He who saw this has borne witness, so that you also may believe. His testimony is true.” (Jn 19:35) It is in contemplating Jesus’s death that faith grows stronger and receives a dazzling light, a faith in Christ’s steadfast love, a love capable of embracing death to bring us salvation. This love did not recoil before death in order to show its depth. It is something I can believe in. Christ’s total self-gift overcomes every suspicion and enables me to entrust myself to him completely.

17. Christ’s death discloses the utter reliability of God’s love. As the risen one, Christ is the witness, deserving of faith. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile,” says Saint Paul. He speaks of “faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” This “faith in the Son of God” presumes that Jesus is worthy of faith, not only because he loved us unto death, but also because of his divine sonship. Because Jesus is the Son, absolutely grounded in the Father, he was able to conquer death making the fullness of life shine forth. Our culture has lost its sense of God’s presence in our world. We think that God is to be found in the beyond. If this were the case, his love would not be truly powerful, capable of delivering the bliss that it promises. It would make no difference whether we believed in him or not. Christians profess their faith in God’s tangible love that acts in history determining its final destiny; an encountered love, fully revealed in Christ’s passion, death and resurrection.

18. In faith, Christ is not simply the one in whom we believe. He is also the one with whom we are united. Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus. Faith is also a participating in his way of seeing. In many areas of our lives we trust others who know more than we. Where God is concerned, we also need someone trustworthy and knowledgeable. Jesus, the Son of God, makes God known to us. Christ’s life opens up new and inviting vistas for us. In addition to “believing that” what Jesus tells us is true, John the Evangelist speaks of “believing” Jesus and “believing in” Jesus. We “believe” Jesus when we accept his word because he is truthful. We “believe in” Jesus when we personally welcome him into our lives and follow in his footsteps.

To enable us to know, accept and follow him, the Son of God took on our flesh. Christian faith is faith in the incarnation of the Word and his bodily resurrection. It is faith in a God so close to us that he entered our human history. Faith in the Son of God made man enables us to grasp reality’s deepest
meaning and to see how much God loves this world that he is constantly guiding it towards himself. This leads us to live our lives in the world with ever greater commitment and intensity.

**Salvation by Faith**

Saint Paul has left us a description of the life of faith. He says that believers become a new creation. They receive a new being. They are now “sons in the Son.” The phrase “Abba, Father”, so much of Jesus’ own experience becomes the core of the Christian experience. The life of faith, as filial existence, is the primordial and radical gift that upholds our lives.

St. Paul’s question to the Corinthians: “What have you that you did not receive?” was at the very heart of his debate with the Pharisees: the issue of whether salvation is attained by faith or by the works of the law. Such people, even when they obey the commandments and do good works, are centered on themselves. They fail to realize that goodness comes from God. They become closed in on themselves and isolated from the Lord and from others. Saint Augustine tells us, “Do not turn away from the one who made you, even to turn towards yourself.” The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being. Only by acknowledging this gift can we be transformed. Salvation by faith means recognizing the primacy of God’s gift. St. Paul puts it this way: “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.

20. Faith’s new way of seeing things is centered on Christ. Faith in Christ brings salvation because our lives become radically open to a love that precedes and transforms us from within. Paul interprets the nearness of God’s word in terms of Christ’s presence in the Christian. Christ came down to earth and rose from the dead. By his Incarnation and resurrection, the son of God embraced the whole of human life and history. He now dwells in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Faith knows that God has drawn close to us. Christ has been given to us as a great gift that inwardly transforms us. It bestows on us the light that illumines the origin and the end of life.

21. We come to see the difference that faith makes for us. Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith. St. Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, …May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith!” This self-awareness now expands. In love, life takes on a whole new breath. Here we see the Holy Spirit at work. The Christian can see with the eyes of Jesus and share in his mind. In the love of Jesus, we receive in a certain way his vision. Without the presence of the Spirit, it is impossible to confess him as Lord.

**The Ecclesial Form of Faith**

22. In this way, the life of the believer becomes a life lived in the Church. St. Paul tells the Christians of Rome that all who believe in Christ make up one body. Those who believe come to see themselves in the light of the faith that they profess. Christ is the mirror in which they find their image fully realized.
As Christ gathers all those who believe and makes them his body, so the Christian comes to see himself as a member of this body. The image of a body does not imply that the believer is a part of an anonymous whole. Rather it brings out the vital union of Christ with believers and of believers among themselves. Christians are “one.” In service to others they truly come into their own. That is why apart from this body, outside this Church, which, Romano Guardini says, “is the bearer within history of the plenary gaze of Christ on the world,” faith loses its “measure.” Faith is necessarily ecclesial (of the church), professed from within the body of Christ as a real communion of believers. Faith is not a private matter, an individualistic notion or a personal opinion. It comes from hearing, and is meant to find expression in words and to be proclaimed. Faith becomes operative in the Christian on the basis of the gift received, the love that attracts our hearts to Christ and enables us to become part of the Church’s great pilgrimage through history. For those who have been transformed in this way, a new way of seeing opens up. Faith becomes light for their eyes.

CHAPTER TWO: UNLESS YOU BELIEVE, YOU WILL NOT UNDERSTAND (cf. Is 7:9)

Faith and Truth

23. Unless you believe, you will not understand says the Greek version of the Bible. The Hebrew version has the Prophet saying to the King, “If you will not believe, you shall not be established.” There is a play on the verb, aman, “you will believe” (ta’aminu) and “you shall be established” (te amenu). The King seeks the security that the great Assyrian empire can offer. The prophet tells him instead to trust in the steadfast rock that is the God of Israel. Because God is trustworthy, it is reasonable to have faith in him. It might seem that the Greek version of the Bible, by translating “be established” as “understand”, profoundly altered the meaning. Yet, this translation, while certainly reflecting a dialogue with Hellenistic culture, is not alien to the spirit of the Hebrew text. The prophet challenges the King, and us, to understand the Lord’s ways, seeing in God’s faithfulness the wise plan. St. Augustine took up this synthesis of “understanding” and “being established” in his Confessions when he spoke of the truth on which one may rely in order to stand fast. From the context we know that Augustine wished to show that this trustworthy truth of God is, as the Bible makes clear, his faithful presence throughout history.

24. St. Augustine understands last week’s prophetic text in this way: we need knowledge and truth, because without these we cannot stand firm. Faith without truth does not save. It does not provide a sure footing. It remains a beautiful story, a vision of our desire for happiness. Either that or it is reduced to a sentiment that brings some cheer but remains prey to the vagaries of the human spirit. If such were faith, King Ahaz would have been right not to stake the security of his kingdom on a feeling. Because of its intrinsic link to truth, faith is able to offer new light, superior to the king’s calculations. It takes into account the hand of God, who remains faithful.

25. Given today’s crisis of truth, we need to be reminded of this bond between faith and truth. We often tend to consider the only truth to be that of technology. Truth is “what works,” “what makes life
easier”. This seems to be the only truth that is certain, the only truth that serves as a basis for
discussion or for common undertakings. At the other end of the scale we allow for the subjective
truths of the individual. Yet these are truths valid only for that individual, not for serving the common
good. But the truth that could explain our life as individuals and in society is regarded with suspicion.
This truth, we hear it said, is what was claimed by the great totalitarian movements of the last century,
crushing the lives of individuals. In the end then, what we are left with is relativism. Ultimately this
means even God is no longer relevant. It would be logical to attempt to sever the bond between
religion and truth for it seems to lie at the root of fanaticism. In this regard though, we can speak of a
massive amnesia in our contemporary world. The question of truth is really a question of memory for
it deals with something prior to ourselves. It is a question about the origin of all that is, in whose light
we can glimpse the goal and meaning of our common path.

Knowledge of the Truth and Love
26. Can Christian faith provide a service to the common good with a right way to understand truth? Saint
Paul can help us when he says, “One believes with the heart.” (Rom 10:10) In the Bible, the heart is
the core of the human person. The heart is where we are open to truth and love, where we let them
touch us and transform us. Faith transforms the person to the extent that the person is open to love.
Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment. Faith’s
understanding is born when we receive the love of God that transforms us inwardly and enables us to
see reality with new eyes.

27. Most people today would not consider love as related in any way to truth. Love is an experience
associated with the world of fleeting emotions, no longer with truth. Can love be reduced to an
ephemeral emotion? True, it engages our affectivity, but in order to build a lasting relationship, love
aims at union with the beloved. We begin to see how love requires truth. Only when love is
grounded in truth can it endure over time, can it transcend the passing moment and be solid enough
to sustain a shared journey. True love unifies all the elements of our person and becomes a new light
pointing to a fulfilled life. Without truth, love is incapable of a firm bond. It cannot liberate our isolated
egos in order to create life and bear fruit.

If love needs truth, truth also needs love. Without love, truth becomes cold, impersonal and
oppressive ... We seek the truth that gives meaning to our journey through life and enlightens us
whenever we are touched by love. Love is an experience of truth. It opens our eyes to see reality in a
new way, in union with the beloved. Saint Gregory the Great wrote, “Love is itself a kind of
knowledge.” It is a relational way of viewing the world, becoming a form of shared knowledge.
William of Saint Thierry, in the Middle Ages, commented on the Song of Songs where the lover says
to the beloved, “Your eyes are doves.” The two eyes, says William, are faith-filled reason and love,
rising to contemplation of God in an enlightened love.
28. This discovery of love as a source of knowledge finds authoritative expression in the biblical understanding of faith. Faith-knowledge is born of God’s covenantal love, a knowledge that lights up history. In the Bible, truth and fidelity go together. The true God is the God of fidelity. Through the experience of the prophets, in the pain of exile and in the hope of a return to the holy city, Israel came to see that this divine “truth” extended beyond itself to the history of the whole world. Faith-knowledge sheds light not only on one particular people, but the entire history of the world from its origins to its consummation.

Faith as Hearing and Sight
29. Because faith-knowledge is linked to the covenant with a faithful God who speaks his word to man, the Bible sees it as a type of hearing. St. Paul’s formula became classic: “Faith comes from hearing.” Knowledge linked to a word is always personal knowledge. It recognizes the one speaking and in freedom is open to that person and follows him in obedience. Paul spoke of “obedience of faith.” But faith is also knowledge bound to passage of time. It is knowledge acquired along a journey of discipleship. The experience of hearing can help to bring out the bond between knowledge and love. At times, where knowledge of the truth is concerned, hearing seems opposed to sight. Sight was characteristic of the Greek culture. If light makes possible the contemplation of the whole, it seems to leave no space for freedom, since it comes down from heaven directly to the eye, without calling for a response. It also seems to call for a static contemplation, far removed from the real world. Given this view, the biblical understanding of knowledge would be opposed to the Greek understanding, as the latter linked knowledge to sight so as to attain a comprehensive understanding of reality. This opposition is only apparent. The Old Testament combined both kinds of knowledge, for God’s word comes with the desire to see his face. The ground was laid for a dialogue with Greek culture. Hearing emphasizes personal vocation and obedience, and truth is revealed in time. Sight provides a vision of the entire journey and without it we are left only with the unconnected parts of an unknown whole.

30. The bond between seeing and hearing in faith-knowledge is most evident in John’s Gospel. In it to believe is to hear and to see. Faith’s hearing is a form of knowing proper to love, a personal hearing that recognizes the voice of the Good Shepherd. It calls for discipleship, as in the case of the first disciples: “Hearing him say these things, they followed Jesus.” But faith is also tied to sight. Seeing the signs that Jesus worked leads at times to faith, as in the raising of Lazarus, “having seen what he did, (the Jews) believed in him.” At other times, faith leads to deeper vision: “If you believe, you will see the glory of God.” Joined to hearing, seeing becomes a form of following Christ. Easter morning passes from John who, standing in the morning darkness before the empty tomb, “saw and believed” to Mary Magdalene, who, after hearing Jesus and wanting to cling to him, is asked to contemplate him ascending to the Father and then to her confession to the disciples: “I have seen the Lord!”
A synthesis between hearing and seeing becomes possible through the person of Christ himself, the Word made flesh, who can be seen and heard. In John’s Gospel the truth that faith attains is the revelation of the Father in the Son, in his flesh and in his earthly deeds, the “light-filled life” of Jesus. The truth that faith discloses is centered on an encounter with Christ, on the contemplation of his life and presence. Thomas Aquinas spoke of the Apostles’ “faith that sees” in the presence of the body of the Risen Lord. They saw the risen Jesus and believed.

31. It was only by taking flesh, by sharing our humanity, that the knowledge proper to love could come to full fruition. The light of love is born only when our hearts are touched and we open ourselves to the interior presence of the beloved, who enables us to recognize his mystery. Saint John spoke of faith as touch in his First Letter. Jesus has touched us and through the sacraments he continues to touch us even today, transforming our hearts. In faith, we can touch him as well and receive the power of his grace. Saint Augustine said that to touch him with our hearts is what it means to believe. Only when we are configured to Jesus do we receive the eyes needed to see him.

The Dialogue between Faith and Reason

32. Christian faith, inasmuch as it opens us to the power of God’s love, penetrates to the core of our human experience. Desirous of illumining all reality with the love of God, the first Christians found in the Greek world an ideal partner in dialogue. The encounter of the Gospel message with the philosophical culture of the ancient world stimulated a fruitful interaction between faith and reason. Blessed John Paul II, in Fides et Ratio, showed how faith and reason strengthen each other. Once we discover the light of Christ’s love, we realize that the loves in our own lives had always that ray of light. All love is meant to share in the complete self-gift of the Son of God for our sake.

33. In the life of Saint Augustine we find a significant example of this process whereby reason was integrated into the horizon of faith and thus gained new understanding. The decisive moment in Augustine’s journey of faith was not in the vision of a God above and beyond, but in an experience of hearing. In the garden he heard a voice telling him: “Take and read”. He then took up the book and read the thirteenth chapter of the Letter to the Romans. In this way the personal God of the Bible appeared to him: a God who could speak to us, making himself known in a time of hearing and response. Augustine integrated the two perspectives of hearing and seeing, guided by the revelation of God’s love in Jesus. He could therefore associate hearing and seeing and speak of “the word that shines forth within.” The light becomes the light of the world because it is the light of a personal countenance, a light that, even as it enlightens us, calls us and seeks to be reflected on our faces and to shine from within us. Yet our longing for the vision of the whole will be fulfilled only in the end, when as Augustine says, we will see and we will love because we will enter wholly into that unique light.

34. The light of love proper to faith can illumine the questions of our own time about truth. Truth nowadays is often reduced to the subjective authenticity of the individual. A truth common to all
intimidates us. But if truth is a truth of love, then it can be set free from its enclosure in individuals and become part of the common good. A truth of love is not one that can be imposed by force. Born of love, it can penetrate the heart. Then, faith is not intransigent but grows in respectful coexistence with others. Truth leads to humility, since believers know that it is truth that embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith enables witness and dialogue with everyone.

The light of faith, joined to the truth of love, is always lived out in body and spirit. The light of faith is an incarnate light, radiating from the luminous life of Jesus. It also illumines the material world. The gaze of science thus benefits from faith. Faith awakens the critical sense helping it to realize that nature is always greater. Before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on a world open to scientific investigation.

**Faith and the Search for God**

35. The light of faith in Jesus also illumines the path of all those who seek God ... In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we see how the path of the religious man passes through the acknowledgment of a God who cares for us and is not impossible to find. What reward can God give those who seek him, if not to let himself be found? Religious man strives to see signs of God in the daily experiences of life, in the cycle of the seasons, in the fruitfulness of the earth. God...can be found by those who seek him with a sincere heart.

An image of this seeking can be seen in the Magi. For them God’s light appeared as a journey to be undertaken, a star that led them on a path of discovery. Religious man is a wayfarer. He must be ready to let himself be led to find the God of perpetual surprises. This respect on God’s part for our human eyes shows us that when we draw near to God, our human lights shine all the more brightly the closer they approach the primordial fire. Christian faith in Jesus proclaims that all God’s light is concentrated in him, the “luminous light” that discloses the origin and the end of history. There is no journey of man to God that cannot be taken up, illumined and purified by this light. The more Christians immerse themselves in the circle of Christ’s light, the more capable they become of accompanying the path of every man towards God.

35. Because faith is a way, it also has to do with non-believers who nonetheless desire to believe and continue to seek. To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and have set out with whatever light they can find, they are already on the path leading to faith. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons tells how Abraham, before hearing God’s voice, had already sought him “in the ardent desire of his heart”, until “God had pity on him who, all alone, had sought him in silence”. Anyone who sets off on the path of doing good to others is already drawing near to God. It is so characteristic of the divine light to brighten our eyes whenever we walk towards the fullness of love.

**Faith and Theology**
36. Since faith is a light, it draws us into itself, inviting us to explore ever more fully the horizon that it illumines in order to better to know the object of our love. Christian theology is born of this desire. Clearly, theology is impossible without faith. It is part of the very process of faith. It follows that theology is more than simply an effort of human reason to analyze and understand. God cannot be reduced to an object. He is a subject who makes himself known. Right faith orients reason to open itself to the light that comes from God. The great medieval theologians rightly held that theology is a participation in God’s own knowledge of himself. It is first and foremost the acceptance and the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the word that speaks to us, the word which God speaks about himself. He allows us to enter into this dialogue. Theology thus demands the humility to be “touched” by God, admitting its own limitations before the mystery, while striving to investigate the inexhaustible riches of this mystery. Theology also shares in the ecclesial form of faith, the believing subject that is the Church. This implies that theology must be at the service of the faith of Christians working humbly to protect and deepen the faith of everyone. Because it draws its life from faith, theology cannot consider the magisterium of the Pope and the bishops in communion with him as something extrinsic, but rather as one of its internal, constitutive dimensions attaining to the word of Christ in all its integrity.

Chapter III I Delivered to You What I Also Received (cf. 1 Cor 15:3)

The Church, Mother of Our Faith

37. Those who have opened their hearts to God’s love, heard his voice and received his light, cannot keep this gift to themselves. Since faith is hearing and seeing, it is also handed on as word and light. The word, once accepted, becomes a response, a confession of faith that spreads to others and invites them to believe. The light of Christ shines... upon the face of Christians. ... it comes down to us so that we too can share in that vision and reflect that light to others. As in the Easter liturgy, the light of the paschal candle lights countless other candles. Faith is passed on by contact from one person to another just as one candle is lighted from another. Christians, in their poverty, plant a seed so rich that it becomes a great tree, capable of filling the world with its fruit.

38. Because faith is born of an encounter that takes place in history and lights up our journey through time, it must be passed on in every age. Through an unbroken chain of witnesses we come to see the face of Jesus. But how can we be certain, after all these centuries, that we have encountered the “real Jesus”? Were we merely isolated individuals, a certainty of this sort would be impossible. I cannot possibly verify for myself something that happened so long ago. However, persons always live in relationship. We come from others, we belong to others, and our lives are enlarged by our encounter with others. Even our own knowledge and self-awareness are relational; they are linked to others who have gone before us. Language itself comes from others, preserved in the living memory of others. The same thing holds true for faith. Faith’s past comes down to us through the memory of others, witnesses. The Church is a Mother who teaches us to speak the language of faith. The love
that is the Holy Spirit and that dwells in the Church unites every age and makes us contemporaries of Jesus.

39. Faith is not simply an individual decision that takes place in the depths of the believer’s heart, between an autonomous subject and God. By its very nature, faith is open to the “We” of the Church. We are reminded of this by the dialogical format of the creed used in the baptismal liturgy. We can respond in the singular—“I believe”—only because we are part of a greater fellowship and because we also say “We believe”. “We” reflects the openness of God’s own love that is not only a relationship between the Father and the Son, between an “I” and a “Thou”, but is also in the Spirit, a “We”, a communion of persons. Tertullian puts this well when he describes the catechumens who are welcomed into the house of their mother and, as part of a new family, pray the Our Father together with their brothers and sisters.

The Sacraments and the Transmission of Faith

40. The Church, like every family, passes on to her children the whole store of her memories. It is through the Apostolic Tradition preserved in the Church with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that we enjoy a living contact with the foundational memory, handed down by the apostles. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates andtransmits to every generation all that she is, all that she believes.

Faith needs a setting in which it can be witnessed to and communicated. In order to transmit a purely doctrinal content, an idea might suffice. But what is communicated in the Church and handed down in her living Tradition are the new light born of an encounter with the true God. It touches us at the core of our being and opens us to a relationship lived in communion. The special means of passing down this fullness are the sacraments, celebrated in the Church’s liturgy. The sacraments communicate an infleshed memory, linked to all our senses. In them the whole person is engaged as a part of a network of conjoined relationships. The awakening of faith is linked to the dawning of a new sacramental sense in which visible realities are seen to point beyond themselves to the mystery of the eternal.

41. The transmission of faith occurs foremost in baptism. Some might think [it] merely a way of symbolizing the confession of faith. Saint Paul reminds us that this is not the case. Paul states that “we too might walk in newness of life.” In baptism we become a new creation and God’s adopted children. In baptism we receive both a teaching to be professed and a specific way of life demanding the engagement of the whole person. [The] baptized are set in a new and shared way of acting in the Church. Baptism makes us see that faith is something that must be received by entering into the ecclesial communion that transmits God’s gift. No one baptizes himself just as no one comes into the world by himself. Baptism is something we receive.

42. What are the elements of baptism that introduce us into this new “standard of teaching”? First, it is the name of the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. From the outset, a synthesis of the
journey of faith is provided. God, in giving us his Son, revealed fully the mystery of his Name bestowing upon the baptized a new filial identity. Water is at once a symbol of death and a symbol of life. We are reborn by following Christ in his new life. Through immersion in water, baptism speaks to us of the incarnational structure of faith. Christ radically transforms us, making us adopted children of God and sharers in the divine nature. He modifies all our relationships and opens them to God's own life of communion.

43. The structure of Baptism, in its form as a rebirth, helps us to appreciate the importance of infant baptism. Children are not capable of accepting the faith by a free act, nor to profess that faith on their own. The faith is professed by their parents and godparents in their name. Since faith is lived within the community of the Church, a common "We", children can be supported by others, and welcomed into their faith that is the faith of the Church, symbolized by the candle that the child's father lights from the paschal candle. The structure of Baptism demonstrates the critical importance of cooperation between Church and family. Parents are called not only to bring children into the world but also to bring them to God. Through Baptism they are reborn as children of God and receive the gift of faith. This orientation toward God will be further strengthened as it is sealed by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation.

44. The sacramental character of faith finds its highest expression in the Eucharist, a precious nourishment for the faith in an encounter with Christ through the life-giving gift of himself. In the Eucharist bread and wine are changed into the body and blood Christ in a movement that draws us, body and soul, into the movement of all creation to its fulfillment in God.

45. The Church hands down her memory especially through the profession of faith. The Creed, when it is recited draws the whole of life into a journey towards full communion with the living God. In the Creed believers are invited to enter into the mystery that they profess and are transformed by it. It has a Trinitarian structure: the Father and the Son united in the Spirit of love. The believer thus states that the inmost secret of all reality is this divine communion. The Creed also contains a Christological confession: the mysteries of Christ's life up to his death, resurrection and ascension into heaven before his final return in glory. It tells us that this God of communion embraces all of human history, drawing it into the dynamic unity of the Godhead that has its source and fulfillment in the Father. The believer is taken up into the truth being professed. He or she cannot truthfully recite the words of the Creed without being changed and becoming part of that history of love that embraces us. Our being experiences a sharing in a great fellowship, in the ultimate subject, the Church. All the truths in which we believe ultimately point to a journey of communion with the living God.

Faith, Prayer and the Decalogue

46. Two other elements are essential in the faithful transmission of the Church's memory. The first is the Lord's Prayer. Here Christians learn to share in Christ's own spiritual experience and see all things
through his eyes. From the only-begotten Son of the Father, we come to know God and can kindle in others the desire to draw near to him. Important is the link between faith and the Decalogue. Faith takes the form of a journey, a path that begins with an encounter with the living God. It is in the light of faith in the God who saves that the Ten Commandments take on their deepest truth. They are not a set of negative commands, but concrete directions to enter into dialogue with God, to be embraced by his mercy and then to bring that mercy to others. Faith professes the love of God, origin of all things, and lets itself be guided by this love to journey towards the fullness of communion with God. The Decalogue appears as the path of gratitude, the response of love. This path receives new light from Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

The following are the four elements that comprise the memory that the Church hands down: the profession of faith, the celebration of the sacraments, the path of the Ten Commandments, and prayer. The Church’s catechesis has traditionally been structured around these four elements. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is a fundamental aid with which the Church communicates the entire content of her faith: all that she herself is, and all that she believes.

**The Unity and Integrity of Faith**

47. The unity of the Church in time and space is linked to the unity of the faith. These days we find it hard to conceive of a unity in one truth. We tend to think that a unity of this sort is incompatible with freedom of thought, personal autonomy. Yet the experience of love shows us that a common vision is possible. Through love we learn how to see reality through the eyes of others. Genuine love, after the fashion of God’s love, requires truth. The shared contemplation of the truth, that is Jesus Christ, enables love to become deep and enduring, a unity of vision in one body and one spirit. Saint Leo the Great said, “If faith is not one, then it is not faith.” What is the secret of this unity? Faith is one because of the oneness of the God who is known and confessed. All the articles of faith speak of God. Their unit is far superior to any possible rational human construction. They possess a unity that enriches us because it is given to us and makes us one.

Faith is also one because it is directed to the one Lord, to the concrete life of Jesus. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (c. AD 130-202) made this clear in his struggle against Gnosticism. He insisted that there is but one faith, grounded in the concrete event of the incarnation (Jesus taking on flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary) and can never transcend the flesh and history of Christ, in as much as God willed to reveal himself fully in that very flesh. For this reason St. Iraneaus says that there is no difference in the faith of “those able to discourse at length,” and “those who speak but little.”

Finally, faith is one because it is shared by the whole Church, of the one body and one Spirit. We (the whole Church) receive a common gaze. We stand firm on the same rock. We are transformed by the same Spirit of love. We radiate one light and we have a single insight into reality.

48. Since faith is one, it must be professed in all its purity and integrity. Because all the articles of faith are interconnected, to deny one of them is tantamount to distorting the whole. There is need for
vigilance in ensuring that the deposit of faith is passed on in its entirety. Inasmuch as the unity of faith is the unity of the Church, to subtract something from the faith is to subtract something from the truth of communion. The Fathers of the early Church described faith as a body, the body of truth. The integrity of the faith was also tied to the image of the Church as a virgin and her fidelity in love for Christ her spouse. Harming the faith means harming communion with the Lord. **The unity of faith, then, is the unity of a living body.** Faith is thus shown to be universal, catholic, because its light expands in order to illumine the entire cosmos and all of history.

49. The Lord gave his Church the gift of apostolic succession (the bishops who took the place of the apostles to this day). Through this means, the continuity of the Church’s memory is ensured. The assurance of continuity with the origins is thus given by living persons, in a way consonant with the living faith. She depends on the fidelity of witnesses chosen by the Lord for this task. For this reason, the magisterium (the teaching office of the Church) always speaks in obedience to the prior word on which faith is based. In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Paul testifies that he had carried out the task that the Lord had entrusted to him of “declaring the whole counsel of God”. Thanks to the Church’s magisterium this counsel can come to us in its integrity.

**CHAPTER FOUR: GOD PREPARES A CITY FOR THEM (cf. Heb 11:16)**

**Faith and the Common Good**

50. In the stories of the righteous men and women of the Old Testament, the Letter to the Hebrews highlights an essential aspect of their faith. Their faith is not only presented as a journey, but also as the preparing of a place in which human beings can dwell together. The first was Noah who built the Ark. Then there was Abraham, who by faith dwelt in tents as he looked to a city with firm foundations. With faith comes a new reliability that God alone can give. That firmness of faith marks the city that God is preparing for mankind. Faith reveals how firm the bonds can be when God is present. Born of love and reflecting God’s own love, faith sheds light on every human relationship. God who is reliable builds us a city that is reliable.

51. Faith is born of an encounter with God’s love, wherein the meaning of our life becomes evident. Our life is illumined as it becomes a path of activity leading to the fullness of love. The light of faith capably enhances human relations, enriching our lives together. Faith does not draw us away from the concrete world or prove irrelevant. Without a trustworthy love, human unity would be conceivable only on the basis of utility, or perhaps fear, but not on the goodness of living together. In faith we appreciate the design of human relationships because we grasp their destiny in God, in his love. As such, it becomes a service to the common good. Faith is truly a good for everyone, a common good. Its light does not simply brighten the interior of the Church. It helps us build our societies so 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 in which the love of God is laid as a foundation.

**Faith and the Family**
52. In Abraham’s journey towards the future city, the Letter to the Hebrews mentions the blessing that was passed on from fathers to sons. The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family, based on the stable union of a man and a woman. This union is born of their love, a sign of God’s own love. It is the acknowledgment and acceptance of the goodness of sexual differentiation, whereby spouses can become one flesh, enabling them to give birth to new life, a manifestation of the Creator’s loving plan. Promising love forever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own, a plan that sustains us, enabling us to surrender our future entirely to the one we love. Faith also helps us grasp the richness of begetting of children as a sign of the love of the Creator who entrusts us with the mystery of a new person. So it was that Sarah, by faith, became a mother, for she trusted in God’s fidelity to his promise.

53. In the family, faith accompanies every age of life. Children should learn to trust in their parent’s love. It is important that within the family parents encourage the sharing of their faith. Young people, experiencing a time in their lives that is so complex, rich and important for their faith, ought to feel the constant support of their families and of the Church in this faith journey. They want to live life to the fullest. Encountering Christ, and guided by his love, enlarges the horizon of their existence, giving it a firm hope. Faith is no refuge for the fainthearted. It makes us aware of the beautiful vocation of love. It assures us that this love is trustworthy, for it is based on God’s faithfulness, stronger than our every weakness.

A Light for Life in Society

54. Deepened in the family, faith becomes a light capable of illumining all society. As an experience of the mercy of God the Father, it sets us on the path of brotherhood. The history of faith has been one of brotherhood, albeit not without conflict. God called Abraham promising to make of him a great nation. As salvation history progressed, it became evident that God wanted to make all share in that one blessing of Jesus so that all might be one. The Father’s love also comes to us in Jesus through our brothers and sisters. Faith teaches me to see...the light of God’s face shines on me through them. Thanks to faith we have come to understand the unique dignity of each person. In the second century the pagan Celsus reproached Christians for an idea that he considered a delusion: that God created the world for man. At the heart of biblical faith is God’s love, his concrete concern for every person and his plan of salvation for all of humanity, culminating in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without insight into these realities, there is no criterion for discerning human life precious and unique. Man, lost in the universe, is adrift renouncing his moral responsibility, or else presuming to be an absolute judge with unlimited power to manipulate the world around him.

55. Faith, by revealing the love of God the Creator, enables us to respect nature all the more. Faith also helps us to devise developments that are based not only on utility and profit but that consider creation
as a gift. It teaches us to create just forms of government, realizing that authority comes from God and is meant for the common good. Faith likewise offers the possibility of forgiveness that often demands time, effort and patience. Forgiveness is possible once we discover that goodness is always prior to and more power than evil and that God’s affirmation of our life is deeper than our every denial.

55. When faith is weakened, the foundations of life also risk being weakened. If we remove faith in God from society, mutual trust is weakened and we are united only by fear. In Hebrews we read, “God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.” (Heb11:16) This is to say that God makes a public avowal that he is present in our midst and that he desires to solidify every human relationship. Could it be that we are the ones who are ashamed to call God our God? Are we the ones who fail to confess him in public life? Faith illumines life, setting every event in relationship to the origin and destiny of all things in the Father.

Consolation and Strength Amid Suffering

56. Writing to the Corinthians, St. Paul links his faith to his preaching Gospel. To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing. In such testing Paul sees the most convincing proclamation of the Gospel. It is in weakness that we discover God’s power and we experience a dying that becomes life for Christians. (cf 2 Cor 4:7-12) The eleventh chapter of Hebrews concludes referring to those who suffered for their faith. Christians know that suffering cannot be eliminated. It becomes an act of love and entrustment into the hands of God. In this it becomes a moment of growth in faith and love. By contemplating Christ’s union with the Father 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.

57. The light of faith does not make us forget the sufferings of this world. How many of us have found mediators of light in those who suffered! So it was with Saint Francis of Assisi and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta. They understood the mystery at work. Faith is not a light that scatters all darkness, but a lamp that guides our steps in the night. To those who suffer, God does not provide arguments that explain all; rather, he is an accompanying presence opening a ray of light. In Christ, God wishes to share this path with us. Christ is the one who, having endured suffering, is “pioneer and perfecter of our faith.” Suffering reminds us that faith’s service is always one of hope – a hope that looks ahead in the knowledge that only from God, from the future with the risen Jesus, can our society find lasting foundations. In this sense faith is linked to hope. Even if our dwelling place here below is wasting away, we have an eternal dwelling place already prepared in Christ. In union with faith and charity, hope propels us towards a sure future set against the illusory idols of this world. Yet it grants new momentum to our daily lives. Let us refuse to be robbed of hope by facile answers that block our progress.
Blessed Is She Who Believed (Lk 1:45)

58. In the parable of the sower, St. Luke records the Lord's words about the “good soil”: “These are the ones who when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart.” This mention of an honest and good heart that hears and keeps the word is an implicit portrayal of the faith of the Virgin Mary. The evangelist speaks of how she treasured in her heart all that she had heard and seen so that the word could bear fruit in her life. The Mother of the Lord is the perfect icon of faith.

In Mary is fulfilled the long history of faith in the Old Testament, with its account of so many faithful women, beginning with Sarah, alongside the patriarchs. In the fullness of time, God's word was spoken to Mary. She received that word into her heart and being, so that in her womb it could take flesh to be born as light for humanity. St. Justin Martyr says that Mary, receiving the message of the angel, conceived “faith and joy”. In the Mother of Jesus, faith demonstrated its fruitfulness. ...Mary completed the pilgrimage of faith. In her, the faith journey of the Old Testament was taken up into following Christ and transformed into the gaze of the incarnate Son of God.

59. Because of her close bond with Jesus, Mary is strictly connected to what we believe. As Virgin and Mother, Mary offers a clear sign of Christ's divine sonship. Christ's eternal origin is in the Father. He is Son in a totally unique sense, born in time without the intervention of a man. As the Son, Jesus brings to the world a new beginning, a new light, the fullness of God's faithful love. Mary's true motherhood insured the Son of God an authentic human history. Mary accompanied Jesus to the cross ... her motherhood extended to each of his disciples. She also was present in the upper room after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, imploring the gift of the Spirit. At the center of our faith is our confession of Jesus, the Son of God, born of a woman, who brings us, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, adoption as sons and daughters.

60. Let us turn in prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of our faith: Mother, help our faith! Open our ears to hear God's word and to recognize his voice. Awaken in us a desire to follow in his footsteps... Help us to be touched by his love. Help us to entrust ourselves fully to him and to believe in his love... Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One. Remind us that those who believe are never alone. Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path. May this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day that is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord.