

I entrust to Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, Mother of the Church, Star of the Sea, Help of Christians and Queen of Peace the great work of evangelisation and all who seek to further the Kingdom of God by proclaiming their Faith in Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ

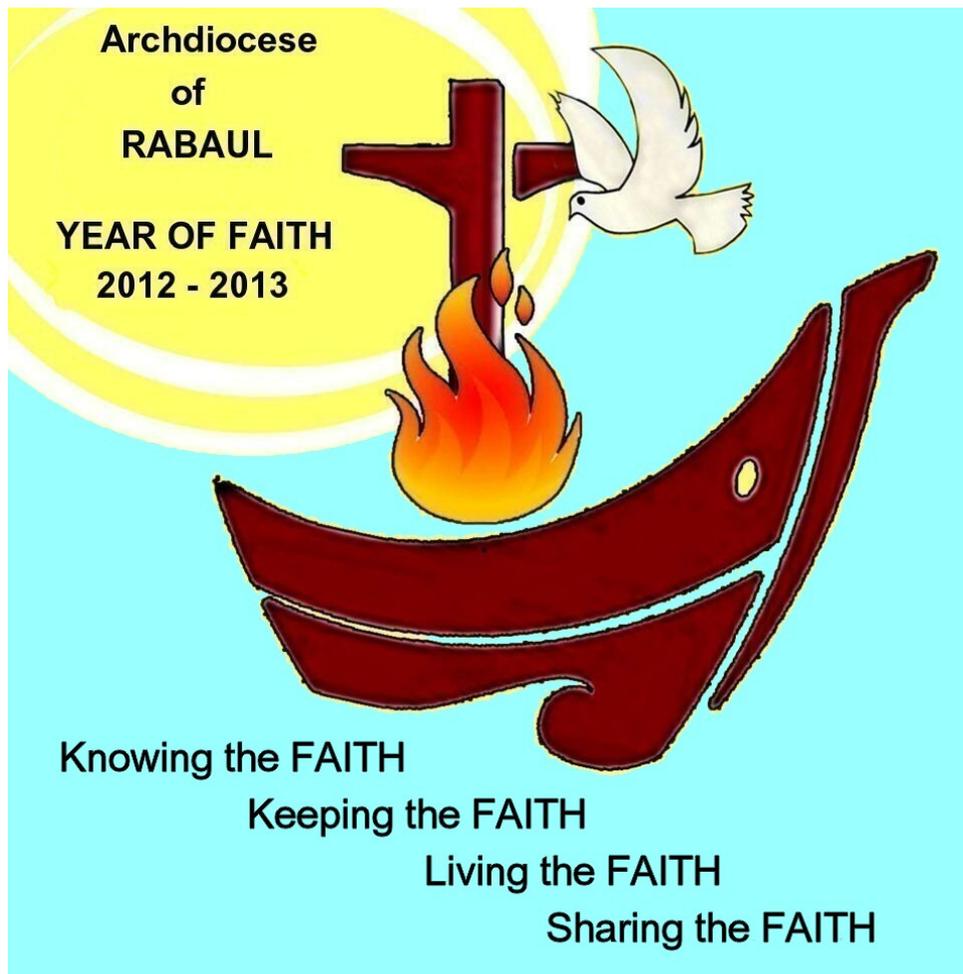
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PASTORAL LETTER 4

7th October 2012 – Feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary

The Year of Faith

Ten years ago, Blessed John Paul II issued the Apostolic Letter “Rosarium Virginis Mariae”, to encourage the Catholic faithful to “re-discover the Rosary in the light of Scripture, in harmony with the Liturgy, and in the context of our daily life” (RVM 43).

The Rosary is certainly a Marian prayer, but at the centre of the Rosary is Jesus Christ, because, while praying the *Hail Mary*, we meditate upon the mysteries of the life of Christ.

That’s why Blessed John Paul II decided to include the Mysteries of Light into the recitation of the Rosary, in order to be truly reflective of the life of Jesus. With the addition of the Mysteries of Light, the Rosary becomes more and more a summary of the Gospel and at its centre is Christ, just as Jesus’ name is at the centre of the Hail Mary when we say: “*Blessed is the fruit of your womb, JESUS!*”.

The meditation on the mysteries of the Incarnation, Life, Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus can help us to deepen our Faith.

As I write this Pastoral Letter on the feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary, *I invite all the Catholic faithful of the Archdiocese of Rabaul to take at heart the Year of Faith, which shall start within few days: on 11th October.*

Exactly a year ago, on 11 October 2011, Pope Benedict XVI, with the Apostolic Letter, “Porta Fidei” (the Door of Faith), announced a Year of Faith. “It will begin on 11 October 2012, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, and it will end on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Universal King, on 24 November 2013”.

In addition, “11 October 2012 also marks the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*”, a text which, in the words of Blessed John Paul II, was meant “to illustrate for all the faithful the power and beauty of the faith”.

Moreover, also on 11 October 2012, the General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will begin with the theme: “**The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith**”.

I believe there is no better opportunity to usher the whole Church into a time of particular reflection and rediscovery of the faith.

Some years ago (2005), the Catholic Bishops’ Conference wrote a Pastoral Letter on Catechetical Renewal, entitled: “*Nurturing the Faith*”. In this Pastoral Letter I will make use of the PNG Bishops’ Pastoral Letter and adapt it to respond to our specific needs in the Archdiocese.

I wish to see greater commitment in our parishes to the distribution of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. In our Book Centre there are still over 2,300 copies in English and more than 1,100 in Pidgin.

Conclusion

The true champions and witnesses of the faith are the Saints and the Blessed. “By faith, the martyrs gave their lives, bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel that had transformed them and made them capable of attaining the greatest gift of love: the forgiveness of their persecutors” (Benedict XVI, Porta Fidei, 13).

The Church of Papua New Guinea can boast of two martyrs: Blessed John Mazzucconi and Blessed Peter To Rot:

- **Blessed John Mazzucconi** came to Oceania with the intention of evangelising and catechising the people of this region. In his apostolic zeal he was ready to shed his blood to bear witness to Christ.
- **Blessed Peter ToRot** is a shining example of a person who has given his life to bear witness to Jesus. He lived his vocation as a catechist with great commitment. As a catechist he gave his life in defence of the holiness of the sacrament of Marriage.

They both challenge us - ordained ministers, consecrated persons, and lay faithful - to continue the work of evangelization and catechesis, in order to make of our archdiocese a Catholic community truly alive in Christ!

As we are about to bring to a close the Year of Blessed Peter ToRot and to open the Year of Faith let us commit ourselves to become credible witnesses, enlightened in mind and heart by the word of God, and capable of opening the hearts and minds of many to Our Lord Jesus Christ.

“the sign of the cross” or of words like: “Amen”, form part of our expression of faith. “What is essential is that texts that are memorized must, at the same time, be taken in and gradually understood in depth, in order to become a source of Christian life on the personal level and the community level” (C.T. 55).

In this regard, I would like to ask priests and catechists to see to the followings:

- That parents and godparents who bring infants and little children for Baptism, after adequate preparation, during the celebration of the sacrament, make aloud the Renewal of their Baptismal Promises.
- That those who receive Communion, to the words “the Body of Christ”, respond with a clear “Amen”, and not with a silent bow.
- That candidates for Confirmation renew the Baptismal Promises in front of everybody in a loud voice without fear or shame. In addition, in order to be admitted to the Sacrament of Confirmation, a candidate must know by heart the Nicene Creed, at least in Pidgin.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Catechism for the Catholics of PNG and SI

In order to arrive at a systematic knowledge of the content of the faith, Benedict XVI believes that “all can find in the Catechism of the Catholic Church a precious and indispensable tool ... Here, in fact, we see the wealth of teaching that the Church has received, safeguarded and proposed in her two thousand years of history ... In its very structure, the Catechism of the Catholic Church follows the development of the faith right up to the great themes of daily life. On page after page, we find that what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a Person who lives within the Church” (Porta Fidei, 11).

What is Evangelisation?

The aim of Evangelization is “*to bring the Good News to the whole of humanity, so that all may live by it*” (Catechesis Tradendae, 18).

Evangelisation will bear fruit when a person turns away from sin and undergoes a change of mind and heart and decides to follow Jesus. Meeting with the Risen Christ brings a person to conversion of heart. Once people believe and have changed their lives, they are ready for catechesis. We all must do more to evangelise ourselves and the many areas of our lives and of society that do not reflect gospel values.

Our common experience shows that if we want to plant a tree we prepare the ground and plant the seed and water it regularly until it grows. Once it has roots it will somehow survive on its own. However, if we want this tree to bear abundant fruit we still have to fertilise it regularly, and clean around its trunk. Only this hard work will assure us of a good harvest. We know that if we don’t take care of it, it will not bear much fruit.

When 130 years ago the first missionaries came to New Britain Island, they planted the seed. We owe them a great debt of gratitude. We call this the *first proclamation*. The tree has grown now, but it still needs care and nourishment. We call this *catechesis*.

What is Catechesis?

Catechesis has a twofold objective: “*of maturing the initial faith and of educating the true disciple of Christ by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person and the message of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Catechesi Tradendae, 19). In

other words, Catechesis is a process of helping the believer to know, contemplate and celebrate the mystery of Jesus Christ and to come into a personal relationship with him. Catechesis helps conversion to grow into a living faith.

Catechesis, therefore,

1. must be ***Christ-centred***. It transmits “not one’s own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ” (C.T. 6). It leads us to contemplate Christ’s face (NMI 16) and to be in personal relationship with him.
2. must be ***rooted in the Word of God***. Familiarity with the Bible through prayerful use, sharing and study, is essential for our Christian life. ‘Ignorance of the Scriptures’, says St. Jerome, ‘is ignorance of Christ’ (NMI 17).
3. must be authentically ***Melanesian***. We use tools, methods and expressions of our local cultures, encouraging people to express their faith in a meaningful way and to address conflicts between culture and religion.
4. must be ***systematic***. The whole of the Catholic faith must be presented in an ordered and programmed way.
5. must bear ***witness to the Kingdom of God***. Catechesis bears fruit when Christians radiate the joy of a life with Jesus.

Those to be catechised

All need ongoing catechesis to accompany their lifelong journey in the Christian community, from those converted as adults to those baptized as infants. Too often we believe that only children need to undergo catechesis; instead ‘***adult catechesis***’ is of greatest importance as it is at this stage in life that we make real faith options. Adult catechesis aims at helping adults to understand and live the faith they received at Baptism. The faith of adults needs to be continually enlightened, developed and pro-

Finally, **lay associations, movements, and groups**, whether their aim is the practice of piety, the direct apostolate, charity and relief work, or a Christian presence in temporal matters, ... have by definition the duty to educate in the faith. These lay associations, movements, and groups will accomplish their objectives better, and serve the Church better, if they give an important place to the serious religious training of their members.

Methods of Catechesis

The Church does not have a particular method for transmitting the faith. She uses methods that are effective in educating to the faith and that suit particular participants in their cultural contexts. It is helpful, for example, to remember that in many places of Papua New Guinea, as well as of New Britain Island, the faith has been handed on by **narrative and story-telling**. These are still the principal means of communication among our peoples. Our effort towards catechetical renewal must, therefore, make the best use of the narrative and story-telling method so characteristic in our cultures.

In this regards, we all know how much our young people like to dramatize events of the Old Testament and especially of the life of Jesus. These dramas, songs and dances can be wonderful catechetical lessons. We need to help young people to stage these performances in a more professional way. All our catechetical programs must be creative, with group activities, in order to motivate and attract people and so lead them to come to know Jesus as a true friend and saviour.

We should not forget that “**memorisation**” of the words of Jesus, of important Bible passages, of the Ten Commandments, of the formulas of profession of the faith, of liturgical texts, of the essential prayers, of key doctrinal ideas, and of simple acts like

for catechesis are: **the family, the parish, the school, and organizations.**

“The **family’s** catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable” (C.T. 68). In other words, *parents* are the first to educate their children in the faith. Together with other members of the family they explain in the home the Christian or religious content of family events, such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement, etc.

Most catechesis best takes place within the **Parish**, as that is the first place where the community of believers gathers to express, celebrate and deepen its faith life. Within the parish the *Small Christian Communities* are also important settings for catechesis. In fact, “Small Christian Communities meet regularly to share their faith in action, thus participating in catechesis”.

In the **Catholic School** religious instruction and catechesis are important elements in the human and Christian formation of young people. Because of the importance of Catechesis at all stages of the child’s development it is necessary that all our Schools, from Elementary, to Vocational Training Centres, Secondary and Tertiary Schools, consider Religion as a subject equal in importance to all other subjects.

While I accept that it is the responsibility of the Bishop, through the Diocesan Catholic Education Coordinator, to ensure that relevant religious education teaching material is made available, I call on all our school boards, school heads, and teachers to offer their students a sound religious and catechetical instruction. *Please, do not neglect this task!* It is your obligation in front of God, of parents and of the whole Catholic community.

tected so that it may give sense, unity and hope to their many experiences. The catechesis of adults is a priority because it is adults who are capable of a fully responsible faith.

In this connection, I wish to remind that the catechumenate is an important expression of adult catechesis. It is a time of catechesis or formation in faith for catechumens accompanied by liturgical rites called *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*. Because it is so important for all to receive a good Christian formation, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference has decided that “the catechumenate for new Christians must last at least one (1) year in all dioceses of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, though this length of time may not be necessary for Christians from mainline churches who desire to be accepted in the Catholic Church”.

Why are so many adults of the belief that they don’t need regular catechesis and that this is “children stuff”? Most probably because they did not receive an adequate catechetical formation as children and young people. It is only when our catechetical programs for **children, adolescents, youth and young adults** is effective that adults will feel the need to continue in their faith development. Young people, for example, need a particular catechesis that addresses problems affecting their lives, such as: the formation of conscience, education to love, involvement in society and vocational guidance. In this regard, I feel that pre-sacramental catechesis for Baptism, First Confession, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Marriage should be given greater attention and importance.

The Bishops’ Conference reminds us that “We must not forget that we as Church are called to reach out to people in special situations: the disabled, handicapped, seriously sick and the elderly; the marginalised like drug addicts, prisoners and victims

of HIV/AIDS; the workers, professionals, politicians, members of the police and military, artists and university students, lapsed Catholics, etc. We are all challenged to organise adequate catechetical programmes that respond to their situations. ***Catechesis and a programme of re-entry may be necessary for Catholics who have left and now decide to come back to the Church***".

Catechesis is also important for *old people* too. For those who have a rich and solid faith catechesis brings to fulfilment their journey of faith. For others who live a faith weakened by a poor Christian life, catechesis becomes for them a moment of new light and religious experience.

Ministers of Catechesis

Catechesis is a responsibility of the whole Christian community because education to the faith is a matter that concerns the whole community. When the whole community cooperates in the work of catechesis, the community itself grows to maturity.

Yet within the Christian community the **Bishop** has the primary responsibility. Blessed John Paul II, in *Catechesi Tradendae* tells the Bishops: "Your principal role will be to bring about and maintain in your Churches a real passion for catechesis, a passion embodied in a pertinent and effective organization, putting into operation the necessary personnel, means and equipment, and also financial resources. You can be sure that if catechesis is done well in your local Churches, everything else will be easier to do" (C.T. 64).

Needless to say that I will try my very best to be faithful to this duty entrusted to me by the Lord and by the Church.

In the field of catechesis, **Priests** are the immediate assistants of

the Bishop. The Vatican Council calls them "instructors in the faith" (P.O, 6). There is no better way to be such instructors than by devoting their best efforts to the growth of their communities in the faith.

For you, my dear priests, I wish to quote the dispassionate words that John Paul II addressed to priests: "All believers have a right to catechesis; all pastors have the duty to provide it... With all my strength I beg you ministers of Jesus Christ: Do not, for lack of zeal or because of some unfortunate preconceived idea, leave the faithful without catechesis. Let it not be said that 'the children beg for food, but no one gives it to them'" (C.T. 64).

Together with the Bishop and the priests, **consecrated men and women** make sure that God's people are properly formed and reach true Christian maturity. Also to you, dear brothers and sisters religious, I wish to quote the late Pope: "I wholeheartedly exhort you... to prepare as well as possible for the task of catechesis according to the differing vocations of your institutes and missions entrusted to you; and to carry this concern everywhere" (C.T., 65).

Lay catechists (men and women) play an important role in the education to the faith. Their work is often lowly and hidden, but it is carried out with ardent and generous zeal. How many of us have received from people like them our first notions of catechism and our preparation for the sacrament of penance, for first communion and confirmation! Indeed, we could define the role of the Catechist as "*one who teaches the faith*".

Where Catechesis Takes Place

Catechesis can be given anywhere, but the "traditional places"